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Editorial - **Dr. Joyashri Dey, Dr. G. Albin Joseph**

• **Reframing Indigenous Governance through the 3C Transformative Framework: A Lived Ethnographic Engagement with Chin–Kuki–Mizo Community Praxis** – Dr. Lalzo S Thangjom

• **Social Media Use and Adolescent Wellbeing: A Narrative Review of Its Impact on Self-Concept, Emotional Maturity, Mental Health and Happiness** – Namrata Dutta & Dr. Ashutosh Shrivastava

• **A Study on Work-life Conditions, Health Issues and Social Welfare of Women Workers in Tea Garden Communities: A Study in Selected Tea Estates of Dibrugarh District, Assam** – Himaloy Barik, Wahengbam Priyalakshmi, Jesmine Baruah & Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Saxena

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CONTENTS

Sl. No.	Title	Author(s)	Page No.
1	Reframing Indigenous Governance through the 3C Transformative Framework: A Lived Ethnographic Engagement with Chin–Kuki–Mizo Community Praxis	Dr. Lalzo S. Thangjom	1
2	Social Media Use and Adolescent Wellbeing: A Narrative Review of Its Impact on Self-Concept, Emotional Maturity, Mental Health and Happiness	Namrata Dutta Dr. Ashutosh Shrivastava	14
3	A Study on Work-life Conditions, Health Issues and Social Welfare of Women Workers in Tea Garden Communities: A Study in Selected Tea Estates of Dibrugarh District, Assam	HimaloyBarik Wahengbam Priyalakshmi Jesmine Baruah Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Saxena	25
4	Empowering Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Training and Skill Development: A Study in Murshidabad District, West Bengal	Tina Sarkar Prof. Subhabrata Dutta	39
5	Invisible Lives in Urban Spaces: Case Studies of Homeless Narikuravar in Chennai	Jani Esekkial M Dr. G. Albin Joseph	50
6	A Qualitative Study on the Living Conditions of the Clay Idol-Makers of Cachar District, Assam	Srijita Ghosh Dr. G Albin Joseph	60
7	Healthcare Access and Reproductive Health Issues Among Tribal Women in Churachandpur, Manipur	Khawlnunsangi Prof. H. Elizabeth	69

8	Challenges to Sustainable Livelihood of the Street Vendors in Guwahati City of Assam	Dr. Bijoy Das Srinivas Rao Manimugdha Medhi	78
9	Barriers Faced by Youth in Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in Tseminyu Town, Nagaland	Ajunlo Kent Dr. Abel Ariina Bokatoli Kinimi Z	87
10	Self-Help Groups as Catalysts of Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Lotovi Village, Nagaland	Sani Koshia Dr. Abel Ariina	99
11	Women Entrepreneurship in Floriculture: Exploring Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities in Senapati District, Manipur	Sani Koshia Dr. Abel Ariina	112
12	Changing Family Structures and Quality of Life of Tribal Older Persons	Stephen JengRonghi Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai	122
13	Use of Internet for Educational Purposes among School-Going Adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam	Sampita Das Dr. G. Albin Joseph	133
14	Occupational Stress among Nurses: A Multiple Case Study at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Bangladesh	Arnob Sanyal Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai	144
15	Sustaining Peace through Inclusive Development in Conflict-Affected Manipur: Pathways to Sustainable Recovery in the OngoingKuki–Meitei Ethnic Conflict	Livingstone Gangmei Dr. Moses Kharbithai	153
16	Role of India in Conflict Resolution in the Strait of Hormuz and Building peace	Ranjan Debnath Bikranta Paul	172
17	Preserving Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge for Sustainable Rural Development: A Review on Challenges and Scope in Northeast India	Dr. Amlan Das Antara Ghosal Prof. Gangabhushan M. Molankal	183
18	Educational Administration, Female Education, and Teacher Training in Colonial Assam (1875–1940)	Yesmin Sultana Dr. Nasruddin Khan	199

19	Youth Involvement Towards Community Disaster Risk Reduction: An Analysis	Suchita Kanoo Dr. Joyashri Dey Gitanjali Sharma Bidisha Deka	208
20	Occupational Hazards & Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Married Women in the Agri-Fishery Sector: Evidence from South 24 Parganas District of Sundarbans	Moumee Jesmin Dr. Rupa Biswas	221
21	Gender Inequality, Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience: A Comparative Gender Perspective Study of India, Japan and Barak Valley region of Assam India in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5.	Prof. Ankur Saxena Chandani Barman	230
22	A Study on the Challenges Faced by the Visually Impaired Students in Schools in Shillong	Dr. Rituparna Rajendra Ibasuk Khyriem	244
23	Climate Variability, Distress Migration and Gendered Livelihood Vulnerability:A Case of Women Tea Plantation Workers	Dr. Rajdeep Dutta	253
24	Ancient Indian Views on Disability through the Eyes of Today's Disabled Individuals	Dr. Ritwika Rajendara Mazida Khatun	268
25	Life Skills and Academic Achievement of High School Students in Shillong, Meghalaya	Wankmenlang Kharbuli Prof. C. Devendiran Prof. A. Muthulakshmi	275
26	Impact of Apiculture on Women's Empowerment: A Case Study from Sewapuri Block, Varanasi	Jagannath Mondal Dr. G. Albin Joseph	291

Editorial

The Social Work Journal has published twenty-six selected papers in volume 16 and issue number 2 on the theme "Social Work in Interdisciplinary and Emerging Contexts". Below are the critical overview and key insights of the scholarly contributions of 52 authors and co-authors.

1. Dr. Lalzo S. Thangjom in his research paper 'Reframing Indigenous Governance through the 3C Transformative Framework: A Lived Ethnographic Engagement with Chin–Kuki–Mizo Community Praxis' attempts to reframe governance and leadership through the indigenous customs of Chin–Kuki–Mizo Communities using the 3C Transformative Framework: Content, Context and Consciousness.
2. Namrata Dutta & Dr. Ashutosh Shrivastava have described the positive and negative impacts of social media on the adolescents and their well-beingby analysing the existing research articles published between 2015 to 2025 in their review paper "Social Media Use and Adolescent Wellbeing: A Narrative Review of Its Impact on Self-Concept, Emotional Maturity, Mental Health and Happiness".
3. In the research paper titled "A Study on Work-life Conditions, Health Issues and Social Welfare of Women Workers in Tea Garden Communities: A Study in Selected Tea Estates of Dibrugarh District, Assam", Himaloy Barik, Wahengbam Priyalakshmi, Jesmine Baruah & Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Saxena have offered an insight on the common health issues among women tea garden workers and analysed the impact of the socio-economic factors on the health of the women's workers. They have also provided somesuggestions for improving healthcare for women tea garden workers.
4. Tina Sarkar & Prof. Subhabrata Dutta aimed to find out the role of RUDSET Institute, Berhampore in promoting women entrepreneurship in Murshidabad district and revealed that entrepreneurship and vocational training programmes prominently improved women's technical skills, financial literacy, self-confidence and decision-making ability that further contributed positivelytowards self-employment generation and sustainable livelihood development in their research paper "Empowering Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Training and Skill Development: A Study in Murshidabad District, West Bengal".
5. Jani Esekkial M, & Dr. G. Albin Joseph in their paper "Invisible Lives in Urban Spaces: Case Studies of Homeless Narikuravar in Chennai" have highlighted that homelessness among the Narikuravar is closely associated to displacement, absence of identity documents, unsafe livelihoods, and exclusion from the modern society through conducting four case studies.
6. In the paper "A Qualitative Study on the Living Conditions of the Clay Idol-Makers of Cachar District, Assam", Srijita Ghosh & Dr. G Albin Josephhave

offered a vivid picture of the socio-economic condition along with the hardships of clay idol-makers residing in Cachar district of Assam.

7. Khawlnunsangi & Prof. H. Elizabeth have studied the data collected from 160 respondents and described that majority of the women faced reproductive health problems, low treatment seeking due to various challenges such as distance, the inaccessibility of public health care in their paper titled "Healthcare Access and Reproductive Health Issues Among Tribal Women in Churachandpur, Manipur".
8. Dr. Bijoy Das, Mr. Srinivas Rao & Mr. Manimugdha Medhi have analysed the socio-economic condition and the challenges of the street vendors as well as the scope of sustainability of this livelihood in their paper- "Challenges to Sustainable Livelihood of the Street Vendors in Guwahati City of Assam".
9. In the paper titled "Barriers Faced by Youth in Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in Tseminyu Town, Nagaland", Ajunlo Kent, Dr. Abel Ariina & Bokatoli Kinimi Z identified lack of awareness about available programmes, inadequate guidance, and absence of mentorship as the most prominent barriers as well as they have also highlighted the need for better awareness campaigns, stronger mentorship systems, and practical youth-oriented training programmes to escalate youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship in the area.
10. Bilu Lohe & Dr. Abel Ariina have analysed the role of SHGs in enhancing women's decision-making power and leadership as well as their socio-economic conditions and challenges faced by the women in SHG participation in their paper titled "Self-Help Groups as Catalysts of Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Lotovi Village, Nagaland".
11. The outcome of the paper titled "Women Entrepreneurship in Floriculture: Exploring Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities in Senapati District, Manipur" authored by Sani Koshia & Dr. Abel Ariina has highlighted the importance of institutional support, market access, and skill development programmes in strengthening women-led floriculture enterprises and promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities in the region.
12. Stephen Jeng Ronghi & Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai have discussed about the family dynamics and psychosocial factors contributing to the quality of life of tribal older person sand provided some recommendations for upliftment of the quality of life of the tribal older persons in their paper- "Changing Family Structures and Quality of Life of Tribal Older Persons".
13. In the research paper titled "Use of Internet for Educational Purposes among School-Going Adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam", Sampita Das and Dr. G. Albin Joseph have examined the challenges related to poor network connectivity, high data costs, distraction, and revealed the increasing dependence on digital education and the need for better internet facilities and academic guidance, especially in rural communities.
14. The qualitative research paper "Occupational Stress among Nurses: A Multiple Case Study at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Bangladesh" by Arnob Sanyal

& Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai aims to focus on the importance of psychosocial support, workplace counselling, stress management interventions, and supportive healthcare policies for enhancing the well-being of the nurses.

15. Livingstone Gangmei & Dr. Moses Kharbithai have offered a detailed analysis on the socio-economic impacts of the conflict across five dimensions: internal-displacement, economic instability, educational disruption, strain on the healthcare system, and the erosion of social cohesion in their paper titled "Sustaining Peace through Inclusive Development in Conflict-Affected Manipur: Pathways to Sustainable Recovery in the Ongoing Kuki–Meitei Ethnic Conflict".
16. Ranjan Debnath & Bikranta Paul in their paper "Role of India in Conflict Resolution in the Strait of Hormuz and Building Peace" have attempted to focus on the importance of humanitarian rehabilitation, social work interventions and long-term peace building in addressing the social and human cost of conflict.
17. In the review paper titled "Preserving Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge for Sustainable Rural Development: A Review on Challenges and Scope in Northeast India", Dr. Amlan Das, Antara Ghosal & Prof. Gangabhushan M. Molankal have examined the complex interplay between Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and sustainable rural development in Northeast India along with analysing the challenges and opportunities.
18. Yesmin Sultana & Dr. Nasruddin Khan have explained the change and development of school administration developed in colonial Assam in the paper- "Educational Administration, Female Education, and Teacher Training in Colonial Assam (1875–1940)".
19. Based on the secondary data, the paper "Youth Involvement Towards Community Disaster Risk Reduction: An Analysis" authored by Suchita Kanoo, Dr. Joyashri Dey, Gitanjali Sharma & Bidisha Deka offers an understanding on youth engagement in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) and proposes a four-pillar framework: youth empowerment, community-based disaster risk management, youth leadership, and sustainability.
20. Moumee Jesmin & Dr. Rupa Biswas highlighted the prevalence of reproductive health vulnerabilities among married agri-fishery women workers in the selected blocks of South 24 Parganas, with particular attention to occupational and livelihood-related determinants in their paper "Occupational Hazards & Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Married Women in the Agri-Fishery Sector: Evidence from South 24 Parganas District of Sundarbans".
21. The paper "Gender Inequality, Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience: A Comparative Gender Perspective Study of India, Japan and Barak Valley Region of Assam, India in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5" by Prof. Ankur Saxena & Chandani Barman discusses the socio-economic causes of gender disparity in agriculture and analyses the role of culture in gender inequality.
22. Dr. Rituparna Rajendra & Ibasuk Khyriem have described the academic challenges and accessibility barriers faced by visually impaired students in

schools in their paper “A Study on the Challenges Faced by the Visually Impaired Students in Schools in Shillong”.

23. Dr. Rajdeep Dutta’s paper “Climate Variability, Distress Migration and Gendered Livelihood Vulnerability: A Case of Women Tea Plantation Workers” highlights the urgent need for implementing gender-sensitive interventions, including protected migration legislation, improved social security systems, and climate-resilient livelihoods through an in-depth case study of women who work as temporary tea garden labourers in the Sonitpur district of Assam.
24. Dr. Ritwika Rajendara & Mazida Khatun in their paper “Ancient Indian Views on Disability through the Eyes of Today’s Disabled Individuals” have revealed how disability was perceived in old Indian stories and scriptures by using a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research.
25. Wankmenlang Kharbuli, Prof. C. Devendiran & Prof. A. Muthulakshmi have adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design and offered an insight on the importance of integrating life-skills education into secondary schooling in the paper- “Life Skills and Academic Achievement of High School Students in Shillong, Meghalaya”.
26. In the qualitative paper titled “Impact of Apiculture on Women's Empowerment: A Case Study from Sewapuri Block, Varanasi”, Jagannath Mondal & Dr. G. Albin Joseph examined the overall impact of the apiculture initiative on the social status and empowerment of rural women within their families and communities.

We are glad to present the research work and insights from the research scholars, academicians and social work professionals as publication in our Social Work Journal. Scholars, and social work practitioners as publication in our Social Work Journal.

Dr. Joyashri Dey
and
Dr. G. Albin Joseph

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Reframing Indigenous Governance through the 3C Transformative Framework: A Lived Ethnographic Engagement with Chin–Kuki–Mizo Community Praxis

Dr. Lalzo S Thangjom[1]

Abstract

Across Northeast India and along the India–Myanmar frontier, governance models based on indigenous customs often fade from view when seen through Western lenses that emphasize personal autonomy. By centering the actual experiences of Chin–Kuki–Mizo communities, this work reframes leadership using the 3C Transformative Framework: Content, Context and Consciousness. In these societies, authority unfolds relationally, adjusts gracefully and draws from real-life insight instead of rigid positions. The rule is not static; it runs through shared recollection, spoken heritage and moment-to-moment perception. Leadership forms dynamically, shifting with daily dialogue, pressed upon by colonial imprints, population movements and modern organizational demands. Each generation reworks what came before, making it their own. Norms shift when communities reshape meaning together. Old customs gradually change through blended approaches. What counts as fair changes depending on the setting; one-size-fits-all fixes rarely fit at all. Real change grows better when policies are closely regulated to everyday experience. From training programs in social services, evidence shows that local wisdom deepens awareness and sparks real shifts in how people act (Thangjom, 2026). A different path already exists - the way of Chin–Kuki–Mizo leadership, which offers an honest model grounded in care, balance and shared belonging.

Keywords: *Indigenous Governance in Northeast India, Chin Kuki Mizo Communities, Customary Law and Lived Experience, Transformative Frameworks through Ethnography, Decolonial Approaches to Community Authority*

Introduction

Deep community roots guide Indigenous governance through values, belonging, and responsibility. Mainstream rule—centred on liberal democracy—often sidelines these as outdated, ignoring Indigenous institutions and upholding Western hierarchies. Insights come from fieldwork and immersion. As a Chin–Kuki–Mizo, the writer's view of authority emerges from daily interactions—community talks, home rules, and elders' guidance. Leadership appears in meetings, family duties, and shared decisions. This perspective merges memory, study, and emotion.

Across Northeast India, Myanmar, and Bangladesh, the Chin, Kuki, and Mizo groups are linked by language, history, and custom—even when separated by state borders. Village life shaped their organisation, with local decision-making. Leadership, like the Mizos' Lal or Kukis' Haosa, was tied to land and conflict resolution. Among the

[1] Dr. Lalzo S. Thangjom, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University

Chin, similar roles kept kin and settlement balance. Power was shared. Elder councils influenced group choices. Decisions are formed through dialogue, shared norms, and traditions passed down through generations.

Indigenous authority grows through relationships rather than statutes, balancing people, land, and custom. Power depends on fostering group peace and sharing, honouring traditions. Place, memory, and changing needs influence decisions, which shift with nature and belief but endure under pressure.

Outside influences have shaped these systems, though they started locally. Authority changed under colonial rule. After independence, legal frameworks changed again; in Mizoram, bureaucratic structures replaced inherited leadership. Traditional practices still exist, blending with state institutions. Changes like ethnic tension, migration, and marginalisation affect influence and belonging (Dutta, 2021). Yet, shared understanding supports progress and social ties, even with slow change.

To build on this, what stands out most is how the 3C Transformative Framework - Content, Context, and Consciousness - opens new paths in understanding Indigenous governance. Rooted in collective community insight, Content forms one pillar of this approach. Shaped by broader historical and social currents, Context adds another layer. Meanwhile, Consciousness brings in personal awareness and active choice. Originally developed within social work, the framework finds fresh meaning when applied here. In this way, it bridges routine actions with deeper thinking, linking them quietly but firmly.

Out-of-classroom practice in social work courses in northeast India yields a different kind of learning. Here, what people have lived through matters more than general ideas. Traditional knowledge gains real weight when heard firsthand. Rooted in experience, insights take shape slowly. From these encounters emerges a new way to see community leadership. The 3C framework fits well when looking at how Chin–Kuki–Mizo systems govern themselves. Change, it turns out, has long been part of their structure. What guides governance? Not just rules, but insight built through doing, seeing, noticing - woven into real conditions. Through blending what we see with ideas tested over time, this study questions old power patterns, pushing instead for everyday truths to shape how support unfolds across cultures.

What stand out are the questions about dominant views sidelining Indigenous leadership. Rather than dismiss tradition, policies could draw from it - shaping decisions through community insight, place-based needs, and fairness. Outcomes often improve when shared knowledge guides the way.

Literature Review

Nowhere more than in Northeast India does questions about belonging rise alongside voices long left out. Leadership among native groups is not tied to rigid offices but to kinship threads that weave through daily life. Peacekeeping and stewardship of resources shape authority there. Scholars once judged these ways using foreign

yardsticks, blind to home grown logic. Watching people without listening distorts understanding. Instead, meaning emerges when customs are seen as evolving frameworks - rooted, resilient, quietly structured. Among Chin, Kuki, and Mizo people, authority in villages emerged not by force but through shared agreement alongside appointed leaders. Power, tied closely to identity and responsibility, shaped routines and relationships alike. Such systems found strength in routine practice rather than rigid rules.

Among the Chin, Kuki, and Mizo communities, authority is evident in everyday speech and in how disagreements are handled. Settling tensions happens through talking things through and rituals that keep group belonging alive. Influence builds slowly, rooted in long-standing ties - yet constantly tested and adjusted over time. Standard views on control often feel too narrow, even out of place here. What counts as valid insight often overlooks roots already present. Leadership seen through heritage carries weight - because experience shaped over generations forms its base (Clarke & Yellow Bird, 2021). Though modern frameworks rise, they rarely erase what came before. Validity emerges where practice meets endurance. Because respect is woven into the role, not granted by title alone. So, acknowledgement functions differently here - not as an add-on, but a foundation.

In light of these evolving understandings, some question current methods, while others find value in shifting toward familiar traditions. Learning grows richer when rooted in shared customs rather than distant theories. In villages across Northeast India, lived examples reshape how ideas unfold. Instead of imported models, people draw from daily realities to understand care and justice. Student voices, recorded recently, highlight a strong preference for lessons that reflect their surroundings. According to Thangjom's findings last year, grounding education in local insight improves both connection and results. Out there among people, learning grows deeper than pages ever allow. When thought meets routine, methods improve - so do choices that affect many.

Beginning in thought, the 3C Transformative Framework - focusing on Content, Context, and Consciousness - provides a structured lens for exploring Indigenous governance. Rooted in Freire's 1970 vision of education as liberation, it aligns closely with practices that challenge systemic injustice. Learning emerges not alone, but through collective work among people. Because power shapes understanding, the world around us shapes what is known. Just as vital is inner clarity - the kind that alters how we see everything. Out of separate parts, something whole forms when knowledge, authority, and daily life connect. Insight grows where it belongs - inside real moments, not outside them.

Though research highlights persistent challenges, colonial legacies continue shaping education and policy - elevating certain knowledges while pushing Indigenous practices aside. Not uniform, tribal communities in Northeast India defy standardised approaches; their varied ways of life call for flexible solutions rooted in immediate contexts (Tripura, 2023). Yet recognition slowly comes: older forms of self-rule

within Native societies may hold value for today's governance systems. Local participation plus shared accountability matter here - governance models emerge where varied perspectives join across years. A careful study remains absent - one that does not force these efforts into tidy categories.

Rooted in personal encounters within villages, today's analysis extends earlier research through the lens of the 3C Transformative Framework, focusing on Chin–Kuki–Mizo forms of rule. Because insights emerge directly from life among people, governance patterns carry stronger resonance with reality. Rather than staying theoretical, concepts are closely linked to actual conditions on the ground. When experience guides inquiry, voices once sidelined start influencing conversations about power. With local knowledge at the centre, academic reflection aligns more clearly with daily living.

Research Gaps

Still, pieces of the puzzle are missing when it comes to seeing how Indigenous leadership changes social work. Although research is piling up, some parts barely get a second look. Not anywhere near whole, the view inches forward through patchy attempts. As interest rises, blind spots become harder to ignore. Even with more being published, key issues haven't faced deep scrutiny. Even with fresh studies emerging often, certain weaknesses remain overlooked. In this area of research, important uncertainties persist without resolution.

Little agreement between theory and actual practice highlights the gap. Research covers indigenous governance in detail - yet links to wider concepts rarely appears. Without stronger connections, clarity fades when examining how knowledge, setting, and choices interact. The whole picture stays fragmented.

Depth exists within the 3C Transformative Framework; however, its role in studying governance remains narrow - particularly for Chin, Kuki, and Mizo groups. So, the view of governance as an evolving web fades just beyond reach.

Starting differently, attention to personal experience remains sparse. Most past work builds on outsider views or second hand records, sidestepping what people within communities actually live through. As noted in Thangjom (2026), understanding how individuals interact with traditional knowledge - day by day - is still poorly mapped. To meet this shortcoming, the current research draws from reflective fieldwork methods.

Though history notes shift over time, little attention is paid to how people manage today's tangled mix of politics, movement, and unrest across borders. Governance rooted in native traditions meets state frameworks - yet that meeting stays barely examined.

Not often do researchers link indigenous governance with hands-on areas like social work or community development. Because of this gap, findings stay confined to

theory rather than shaping real-world actions. Rarely does academic insight find its way into actual programs or policy design. Few bridges exist where dialogue could turn knowledge into meaningful change.

To wrap up, brief practical research connects Indigenous governance to change-focused models that emphasise reflection, autonomy, and fairness. While many acknowledge the value of Indigenous knowledge, how it functions in governing structures still varies - often poorly explained or examined.

Starting from lived experience, this study combines the 3C Transformative Framework with on-the-ground fieldwork to examine governance among Chin–Kuki–Mizo communities. Although shaped by theoretical ideas, it follows paths opened by personal stories. Because insights come directly from people's lives, understanding grows through practice, local settings and shared wisdom. Rather than relying on distant concepts, focus shifts to how authority operates in daily life. What emerges blends form with real human moments. In the end, understanding grows less from ideas alone, yet more through daily realities.

Methodology

This study builds on a qualitative approach informed by constructivism, where meaning emerges through lived experience and shared dialogue. Shaped equally by theoretical reflection and time spent within communities, it unfolds from the scholar’s roots in the Chin–Kuki–Mizo cultural sphere. Interpretation guides the analytic path - yet always anchored in tangible, daily life. Understanding here does not float above context; rather, it lives inside it. What we notice comes through involvement, not distance. Meaning grows as people interact, so approaches adapt along with conversation and situation. Understanding moves wherever lived moments point, shaped more by continual thinking than rigid guidelines.

Research Design

Out of everyday moments comes a look at how people lead in ways that grow naturally within communities, guided by the 3C Transformative Framework. With insights drawn from lived experience and prior work shaping its path. It connects scholarly methods with cultural insight. Analysis is drawn not only on literature but also on firsthand experience. While theory guides the approach, grounding in practice shapes its direction. Interpretation emerges gradually layer by layer. One outcome is a revised view of self-governance rooted in tradition, which can be seen as anew.

Data Sources

Information used in this work came from sources including Scholarly literature on indigenous governance and Northeast India. Ethnographic and historical studies on Chin–Kuki–Mizo communities

Policy documents and institutional reports

Observation-based findings from Thangjom (2026) show that customary knowledge influences social work education - power relations become visible without forced emphasis. Since real-life insight guides professional behaviour, trainees start challenging mainstream views at an early stage. Even when official syllabi neglect indigenous ways of knowing, bottom-up strategies keep emerging during case analysis. In settings where communities lead program design, teaching quietly leans into contemplative modes. A result seen across contexts: deeper student involvement arises once heritage-based perspectives join academic frameworks

Analytical Framework

A close look at the method begins with a design composed of three main parts. Through these pieces, working one after another, tasks take form in ways explained below.

Content: Rooted in community wisdom, customary practices inform how people collectively grasp governance. Lived realities, rather than abstract theories, guide these understandings. Over time, inherited norms blend with routine interactions. What emerges is shaped less by policy documents than by daily life. Shared meaning grows out of repetition, not design. In villages and neighbourhoods alike, precedent matters more than pronouncements. Experience, filtered through generations, sets the frame.

Context: Historical, socio-political, and transnational factors shaping governance systems

Consciousness: Reflexivity, critical awareness, and adaptive agency within communities

Examining governance through varied perspectives reveals layers tied to knowledge, structure, and experience. One lens focuses on comprehension; meanwhile, arrangement influences function, shaped by individual engagement as well. Outcomes emerge not just from design but from real-world participation interacting with systemic frameworks.

Data Analysis

Patterns began to take shape only after several careful readings, each deepening understanding. Because insights grew slowly, early ideas shifted as new ones appeared. The 3C framework guided how codes formed, offering structure without forcing a fit. Instead of staying separate, concepts began to align through close attention. Field notes and theoretical ideas mixed naturally during review cycles. Gradually, meaning settled - not abruptly, but by steady refinement.

Ethical Considerations

Given the ethnographic dimension of the study, ethical considerations include:

Respect for indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices. Reflexive awareness of positionality and representationDeep within a framework of regard, sharing outcomes reflects cultural contexts. As discoveries emerge, they pass through perspectives formed by community-specific conditions. Because subtle details matter, the way knowledge is conveyed shifts accordingly. Each phase follows cues drawn from surroundings, avoiding blanket explanations. Where customs intersect with data, understanding takes form. Listening before speaking builds understanding. What people say matters more than numbers on a page?

Limitations

Even when drawing on established materials, understanding may overlook subtle differences in the daily experiences of the Chin–Kuki–Mizo due to layered interpretations. New clarity often appears only once direct involvement guides research alongside community input.

Results and Discussion

Indigenous Governance in Everyday Practice

Among ways people organise life together, Chin–Kuki–Mizo traditions show governance as a fluid practice shaped by meaning, shared understanding, and awareness. When looked at through fieldwork observations, leadership surfaces during routine moments - such as gatherings under council sheds, duties tied to family roles, settling disagreements, or seasonal ceremonies - where influence emerges gradually, not handed down. Unlike top-down models common elsewhere, here legitimacy grows from participation, not position. Such patterns suggest rule-making lives less in offices than in relationships continually renewed.

Indigenous Knowledge Shapes Governance

Among the Chin–Kuki–Mizo communities, governance arises from inherited customs rather than abstract rules. Rooted in spoken histories, authority emerges through kinship networks that guide conduct, manage territory, and settle disputes. Local

decision-making draws strength from ancestral frameworks instead of external models. Norms passed down by elders shape how power functions in everyday life. Customary practice forms the core of political order in these settings. Knowledge held within the community directs how justice is understood and applied.

Living it daily, rules flow not from written laws but from stories passed down, remembered together, shaped by how people act. Not just an official title - the position of leader, like Lal or Haosa, holds wisdom, guards tradition, links past to present. Gatherings where choices take form include older voices, neighbours speaking up, building agreement slowly, together.

What people actually say backs up this idea? In the study cited, participants stressed the continued relevance of local wisdom for guiding teaching and real-world work, underscoring its continued importance today (Thangjom, 2026). That points to governance knowledge evolving - not fixed - as traditions meet everyday experience.

Authority within indigenous governance often holds because people trust one another, give back when given to, and act in ways seen as right - coercion rarely enters the picture. What keeps these systems alive is less about rules enforced and more about bonds honoured over time.

Historical Shifts and Mixed Governance Forms

Looking back, the Context dimension places indigenous governance amid wider shifts in history and power structures. Not limited to tradition, Chin–Kuki–Mizo systems evolved under colonial rule and were later further bent by nation-state decisions after independence. Today's social currents keep reshaping how these forms of authority function on the ground.

Still present after colonial times, local leadership forms evolved rather than vanished as new governments reshaped laws and offices. Introduced long ago by foreign rulers through indirect control, older power structures shifted slowly under outside influence. Custom ways now mix quietly within official frameworks, surviving change through quiet adaptation. Where state systems stand, tradition finds space beside them, adjusting without fading away.

Everyday routines reveal how people live within blended cultural realities. Depending on the situation, individuals shift between customary expectations and state-imposed rules. When conflicts arise, many still turn to elders or ancestral practices rather than to the courts. These choices show that local forms of leadership remain influential, even in the presence of official laws.

Looking at real-world data backs up this view. When students engage directly through field research or work within communities, their grasp of political and social conditions grows stronger - so does their ability to think critically about practice (Thangjom, 2026). What emerges is a picture in which setting matters not just as background but as lived experience, influencing both perception and action in governance.

History shapes how power works; it shifts through ongoing negotiation instead of staying locked in institutions.

Consciousness, Reflexivity, and Transformation

Reflection shapes how Chin–Kuki–Mizo societies govern - not just through structures, but through thought and values. This inner awareness questions who holds authority and what belonging means, while adapting over time. Governance becomes a living process when guided by ongoing self-examination.

Living through change reveals how traditions shift under modern pressures. Because conversation shapes rules, people keep their heritage alive even as conditions transform. Through discussion, old ways find a place alongside current needs.

From real-world observations and hands-on experiences, we see that hands-on experiences play a key role in building deeper awareness of societal issues. Those who spend more time engaging in local communities tend to think more critically about their actions and show clearer dedication to fairness (Thangjom, 2026). Such patterns support long-standing ideas - meaningful change often grows when insight, personal involvement, and thoughtful analysis come together.

Surprisingly, this aspect questions the idea that native leadership resists evolution. Rather than staying fixed, it shows structures able to rethink, adjust, even shift - bringing fresh meaning to modern discussions on rule. Though often overlooked, such flexibility highlights enduring strength within changing times.

Governance as Everyday Change

Looking at how the three parts of the 3C model connect shows that Chin–Kuki–Mizo governance works through linked, changing patterns. While each element plays a distinct role, their interaction creates ongoing adaptation. Because relationships shift over time, rigidity does not take hold. Instead, authority moves fluidly across groups. This responsiveness emerges not from design but from repeated practice. Over time, such practices shape collective decisions. Even so, external pressures can disrupt these flows. Yet resilience often appears where least expected. So long as communication continues, balance tends to re-form. Such systems do not rely on fixed rules - flexibility is built into daily interactions.

Content provides the epistemic foundation through indigenous knowledge.Context shapes governance through historical and socio-political processes.What we experience subjectively allows us to adjust by thinking about our own thoughts while acting intentionally within environments shaped by those choices.

Out of these elements emerges a view of governance shaped by change - where awareness, setting, and understanding come together so that systems evolve in response to real conditions.

Far from fixed categories, the view here treats indigenous governance as dynamic - shaped by past foundations yet open to new directions. While often seen as static, it actually evolves through layered adaptations over time. Not locked in history, but

actively reinterpreted in present contexts. Through subtle shifts, old frameworks gain fresh relevance without losing core meaning.

Effects on Social Work and Government Operations

What emerges affects how social work operates alongside public administration. Governance shifts when practice responds to new evidence. Insights reshape roles without announcing change. Responses must adapt even if structures resist. Practice evolves where policy hesitates.

Putting indigenous knowledge at the core of decision-making shifts how rules take shape. When plans begin by respecting community-based understanding, outcomes tend to last longer. What matters is not adding local views as an afterthought, but building from them. Approaches work better when shaped by those who live with their effects each day. Lasting change often grows where experience guides design.

Looking closer, the role of context becomes clear - especially where cultures differ widely. Rooted in local structures, social work fits better when it follows how communities actually function.

Looking beyond surface practices, attention to Consciousness highlights practitioners able to reflect deeply while questioning power, identity, or injustice. Especially within efforts to decolonise social work training, such awareness becomes vital.

Looking ahead, what emerges is how indigenous governance models hold lessons - ones worth considering - for reshaping wider approaches to leadership. Participation finds deeper roots here, not as an add-on but as a rhythm of decision-making. Accountability flows differently, shaped by long-standing relationships rather than distant structures. Ethical conduct isn't framed solely by rules, but by lived experience. These patterns don't copy modern templates; they grow from place, memory, and collective responsibility.

Living through change, Chin–Kuki–Mizo forms of self-rule show flexibility built into their core practices. Shaped by experience rather than fixed design, they shift alongside shifting realities. Through awareness, shared meaning emerges - not imposed but grown from within. Knowledge flows where history guides action. Because tradition meets innovation here, governance becomes movement rather than structure. What matters is how people engage what they know, when they know it, and why.

Conclusion

Through the lens of the 3C Transformative Framework - Content, Context, and Consciousness - this research revisits traditional Chin–Kuki–Mizo forms of self-rule, grounding insight in firsthand lived experience. Far from fading relics, such systems here emerge as fluid networks of practice, evolving alongside community rhythms while actively shaping daily existence.

Out of tradition grows a kind of knowing-governance shaped by custom, speech passed down, and real-life practice. Because people remember together, act together, authority stays alive, woven into culture, made by many hands. From an on-the-ground view comes clarity: rules live less in documents than in daily acts, duties felt deeply, understandings held in common.

Not everything vanished when colonisers arrived. Old ways shifted rather than disappearing, shaped by external control and later national policies. Change did not erase tradition - customs bent without breaking. Mixing local norms with official structures became common. Survival shows up in flexibility, not rigidity. How power works now often carries traces of older patterns underneath.

Reflexivity sits at the heart of the Consciousness dimension, where change begins through deliberate human choice. Governance among Indigenous peoples extends beyond structures - it lives within thought patterns and moral choices, always balancing old ways with new realities. Looking closely at lived experience shows how immersion in Indigenous settings sharpens perception, deepening one's sense of duty toward others (Thangjom, 2026). What emerges is clear - understanding, place, and inner awareness work together to shape how authority takes form.

Looking at things differently, the 3C model highlights how Indigenous governance functions as a dynamic adaptation. Challenging dominant narratives that ignore traditional methods, it shifts focus toward their relevance today. While frequently ignored, such systems become noticeable when viewed through this lens. In places where deficits are assumed, the framework instead uncovers persistence. What stands out is not only its conceptual strength but also its grounding in real-life practice. So it happens that views on authority begin to change. When meaning slips just a little, broader beliefs start shifting too.

Policy Recommendations

With these outcomes in mind, the following recommendations aim to inform choices across both governance and routine practice.

1. Indigenous governance systems acknowledged

Change carries weight where tradition already stands firm. Without waiting, state institutions ought to recognise authority rooted in native governance. In areas shaped by tribal life, long-standing practices could guide everyday decisions rather than be swept away by imposed frameworks. Where conflicts emerge, proven approaches may influence how modern rules take form. Rooted in long-standing practice, the local authority blends smoothly within wider governance structures. Unlike imported models, time-tested influence holds equal weight through enduring presence.

2. Indigenous knowledge in development work

Change often ignores local knowledge, yet outcomes improve when such wisdom shapes design. Where stewardship counts, traditions quietly support durable

decisions. Conversations built on shared norms tend to ease friction. Progress rooted in place begins long before planners arrive. What lasts often begins in everyday exchanges between people. Learning flows from one generation to the next, quietly shaping how life is lived. Thoughts that find space in common routines tend to endure without force. Over the years, familiarity gives them weight others cannot match.

3. Improving How Shared Rules Work Together

Most of the time, enduring outcomes emerge less from single steps than from ongoing interaction among communities. Where traditional practices encounter current systems, advancement tends to occur provided guidelines permit some give. Side by side, older leaders and government officials grow confidence via steady engagement. Over many months or even years, cooperation fades into routine, barely visible in everyday life. When partners share daily patterns, space appears for subtle shifts in power without losing individuality. Where fairness guides effort, consistency tends to take root.

4. Context-Aware Social Work Practice

Slow growth of trust means better results happen under the advice of respected elders. Instead of introducing outside methods, help usually moves along family lines already in place. Shared planning brings choices that honour deep-rooted traditions. Better results emerge when teamwork replaces one-way control.

In connection with social work, promoting awareness and reflective thinking in learning further supports meaningful engagement. Life's real situations add weight to learning once practice meets theory. Following action with reflection helps students see unseen social rhythms in common experiences.Outside school, learning grows by doing. Experience shapes insight more than lectures can. Meeting real communities changes how future experts solve social issues.

6. Undoing Colonial Roots in Government Rules

From the bottom, realignment begins when power stops favouring only European models. Ways of understanding that were once pushed aside start mattering just as much. Not every system works everywhere; a room opens when varied perspectives shape choices. When shifts happen, policies slowly show who truly belongs in shaping truth. Fairness grows where inclusion is built, not claimed.

7. Encouraging Community-Led Governance

Starting with local voices often leads to more trusted decision-making structures rooted in tradition. When communities shape their own rules, fairness tends to follow - especially where customs already support collective agreement. These systems gain strength because people see themselves in the process. Trust grows when responsibilities are held together, not assigned from above. Outcomes feel more just if shaped by those affected. Shared methods of listening and deciding have long played a role in maintaining balance.

Final Reflection

Living within these communities reveals how Chin–Kuki–Mizo governance shapes daily existence beyond formal structures. Rooted in shared experience, such systems reflect knowledge passed through generations - ways of living shaped by belonging rather than rules alone. Through the lens of the 3C Transformative Framework, their models emerge as meaningful alternatives: grounded, relational, attentive to place. What stands out is not novelty, but continuity - offering depth where modern approaches often lack.

When societies grow more diverse and layered in their political realities, working alongside Indigenous forms of governance becomes essential - not simply for study, yet also for real-world application. Acknowledging such frameworks offers the potential for fairer, adaptable structures that address actual community needs.

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Social Media Use and Adolescent Wellbeing: A Narrative Review of Its Impact on Self-Concept, Emotional Maturity, Mental Health and Happiness

Namrata Dutta[1]
Dr Ashutosh Shrivastava[2]

Abstract

A significant number of young people are addicted to social media these days. Youth are spending more time on social media, which is changing how they see themselves and how they think in real time. This review paper brings together existing research to look at how using social media affects adolescent's self-image, emotional maturity, mental health, and happiness in a variety of ways. The paper organizes and searches databases using articles from Scopus and Web of Science journals that were published between 2015 and 2025. The results reveal both positive and negative associations. This suggests that social media platforms can be good places for adolescents to express themselves and get support from their peers, but they can also put teens at risk for things like cyberbullying, comparison anxiety, and emotional dysregulation. The review concludes with identified gaps and suggestions for future research directions, highlighting the importance of contextual and cultural variables in mediating these effects.

Keywords: *Social Media use, Adolescents, Self-Concept, Emotional Maturity, Mental Health, Happiness, Psychological Well-being, Identity Development*

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental period characterized by heightened sensitivity to social feedback and peer evaluation. During this time, the brain's socio-affective circuitry undergoes rapid development, particularly in regions linked to emotional learning and social behavior (Crone & Dahl, 2012). These neurological changes make adolescents especially responsive to social rewards such as likes, comments, and shares, increasing their susceptibility to the allure of social media platforms (Sherman et al., 2016). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to their community" (WHO, 2004). Closely related is subjective well-being or happiness, which encompasses individuals' overall evaluation of their emotional experiences and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 1999).

[1] Namrata Dutta, Research Scholar, Programme of Psychology, Downtown University, Guwahati, India. Mobile No. 91 8133022645. Email: jupidutta93@gmail.com

[2] Dr Ashutosh Shrivastava, Associate Professor, Programme of Psychology, Downtown University, Guwahati, India. Mobile No. 91 9151909090. Email: ashutosh@psyuni.com

This review aims to synthesize empirical findings on the influence of social media use on adolescents' self-concept, emotional maturity, mental health, and happiness. By analyzing patterns, identifying gaps, and highlighting moderating factors, this review seeks to contribute to a clearer understanding of how online environments shape adolescent well-being. Such insights can inform the design of targeted interventions, preventive strategies, and policy initiatives to support healthier digital engagement among young people.

Methodology

This narrative review approach isa comprehensive analysis of existing literature related to social media addiction among young people was employed. A structured search strategy was implemented to identify relevant studies and scholarly articles that addressed the key objectives of the review. Electronic databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, and Research Gate were explored using keywords including "social media addiction," "youth," "adolescents," "mental health," and "psychological well-being."

Effects on Self -Concept and Identity formation

Adolescence is a pivotal time for forming one's identity, and social media has become a powerful new space where this process unfolds. Its impact on self-concept and identity is complex, offering both positive opportunities and significant challenges.

Social media provides a unique stage for adolescents to express themselves, allowing them to showcase their "best self" to the world. This digital environment can be a valuable resource for exploring and discovering different sides of their identity. When young people actively engage by experimenting with styles, testing new roles, joining conversations about who they are, or sharing their thoughts and creations online, they tend to explore their identity more deeply (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

At the same time, the quest for authentic self-expression on social media often intertwines with a craving for external validation. Adolescents may seek approval through likes, comments, and shares, which can trigger a rewarding yet fragile cycle. Positive feedback feels good initially, but it can become addictive, causing young people to depend on social approval for their self-worth. When they compare their online engagement or popularity with peers and find themselves falling short, self-esteem may suffer (Nesi & Prinstein, 2015). This cycle reveals the vulnerability of a self-concept that relies predominantly on external rather than internal validation.

What seems especially important is not just how much time adolescents spend on social media, but how they engage with it. Active involvement—posting, commenting, and meaningful interaction—can boost both self-esteem and identity exploration. In contrast, passive consumption, especially activities focused on appearance or late-night browsing, is linked to depression, social comparison, and

body dissatisfaction (Escobar-Viera et al., 2018). Authentic self-presentation online—that is, sharing a version of oneself consistent with offline identity—supports a clearer and more integrated self-concept. On the other hand, presenting an idealized but inconsistent persona leads to confusion and less self-concept clarity (Bargh et al., 2002).

This insight calls for a shift in how we address social media's impact: instead of simply limiting screen time, we should encourage genuine interactions and digital literacy that emphasize self-acceptance and internal validation over chasing external approval. Helping adolescents engage authentically online could strengthen their identity development rather than undermine it (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013).

Impacts on Emotional Maturity and Regulation

Emotional maturity refers to a consistent pattern of behaviour marked by the ability to recognize, manage, and appropriately express one's own emotions while remaining sensitive to the feelings of others. It involves responding to life situations in a balanced and adaptive manner, reflecting harmony between an individual's inner emotional world and external social environment, as well as between cognition and emotion (Singh & Bhargava, 1990). Emotional maturity plays a vital role in personality development, as it promotes responsibility, supports sound decision-making, and enhances interpersonal relationships during adolescence—a critical phase of emotional and psychological growth.

Empirical findings on gender differences in emotional maturity remain inconclusive. While some studies report higher emotional maturity among males, others suggest females demonstrate greater emotional maturity, and several studies find no significant gender-based differences (Gupta & Mehtani, 2017; Sharma, 2018). These mixed findings indicate that emotional maturity is influenced by multiple social, cultural, and developmental factors rather than gender alone.

Recent empirical studies examining social media use, emotion regulation, and adolescent well-being across global and Indian contexts are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Recent Literature (2022–2024) on Social Media Use, Emotion Regulation, and Adolescent Well-Being (Global & Indian Studies)

Author(s) & Year	Country / Sample / Method	Key Variables	Major Findings	In-text Citation
Blakemore (2022)	Global; narrative review	Adolescent brain development, emotion regulation	Adolescence is marked by heightened emotional sensitivity due to	(Blakemore, 2022)

			ongoing development of the prefrontal cortex and limbic regions.	
Beyens et al. (2022)	Europe; longitudinal adolescents	Social media use, emotional well-being	Social media effects differ across adolescents, supporting individual susceptibility models.	(Beyens et al., 2022)
Boer et al. (2022)	Europe; large-scale survey	Social media intensity, mental health	Problematic use predicts emotional problems more strongly than usage frequency.	(Boer et al., 2022)
Marengo et al. (2022)	Italy; cross-sectional adolescents	Visual social media, internalizing symptoms	Appearance-based comparison mediates negative emotional outcomes.	(Marengo et al., 2022)
Alimoradi et al. (2022)	Meta-analysis	Internet addiction, sleep, emotions	Problematic internet use is strongly associated with sleep disturbances and emotional dysregulation.	(Alimoradi et al., 2022)
Kaur & Kaur (2022)	**India; secondary school students**	Social media use, emotional maturity	Excessive social media use is negatively associated with emotional maturity among adolescents.	**(Kaur & Kaur, 2022)**
Sharma & Joshi (2022)	**India; adolescents**	Social networking, self-esteem, emotions	Higher social media engagement predicts emotional instability and	**(Sharma & Joshi, 2022)**

			lower self-esteem.	
Pouwels et al. (2023)	Global; critical review	Social media, mental health	Evidence supports bidirectional links between social media use and emotional well-being.	(Pouwels et al., 2023)
McLaughlin et al. (2023)	Global; developmental review	Emotional development, regulation	Emotion regulation skills continue maturing through adolescence and are sensitive to environmental influences.	(McLaughlin et al., 2023)
Cheng et al. (2023)	32 countries; cross-national	Social media addiction, emotions	Social media addiction is consistently linked with emotional distress across cultures.	(Cheng et al., 2023)
Montag et al. (2023)	Global; empirical study	Emotion dysregulation, SMUD	Emotion dysregulation significantly predicts social media use disorder.	(Montag et al., 2023)
Scott et al. (2023)	UK; longitudinal adolescents	Social media, sleep, mental health	Night-time social media use disrupts sleep, indirectly worsening emotional health.	(Scott et al., 2023)
Singh & Srivastava (2023)	**India; adolescents**	Social media addiction, mental health	Social media addiction is positively related to anxiety, stress, and emotional imbalance.	**(Singh & Srivastava, 2023)**
Patel et al. (2023)	**India; school students**	Screen time, sleep, emotions	Excessive screen exposure predicts poor sleep quality and emotional	**(Patel et al., 2023)**

			dysregulation.	
Twenge et al. (2024)	USA; large datasets	Digital media use, well-being	Heavy digital media use is linked to increased negative emotions and lower happiness.	(Twenge et al., 2024)
Reddy & Rao (2024)	**India; adolescents**	Social media use, happiness, mental health	Problematic social media use negatively predicts subjective happiness and emotional stability.	**(Reddy & Rao, 2024)**

Effects of Social Media on Adolescent Mental Health

The influence of social media on adolescent mental health has become a major area of concern, with research showing both harmful and beneficial effects depending on how and why these platforms are used.

A lot of research links excessive and problematic social media use with poorer mental health outcomes among adolescents, particularly higher levels of depression and anxiety and lower self-esteem (Twenge et al., 2019; Boer et al., 2022). Several studies report a dose–response relationship, indicating that adolescents who spend more than three hours per day on social media are at greater risk of depressive and anxiety symptoms (Twenge et al., 2019). Population-level evidence also suggests that the introduction of new social media platforms has coincided with measurable increases in depression and anxiety among young people (Braghieri et al., 2022).

Social media also provides opportunities for self-expression and creativity, allowing adolescents to share experiences and learn coping strategies from peers facing similar challenges. Participation in supportive online communities and moderated mental health forums has been linked to increased emotional validation and well-being (Pouwels et al., 2023). When used responsibly, social media can serve as a valuable space for connection, shared understanding, and access to mental health information, helping adolescents feel less alone in their struggles.

Effects on Happiness and Overall Well-Being

Adolescent happiness and overall well-being are multidimensional constructs shaped by emotional health, social relationships, and self-perceptions, with social media now playing a central role in adolescents' daily lives.

Subjective Well-Being and Quality of Life

Psychological well-being reflects an individual's ability to live a meaningful and satisfying life in line with personal values. When used positively, social media can enhance adolescents' quality of life by strengthening social connections, increasing perceived social support, and fostering a sense of belonging, which in turn contributes to greater life satisfaction (Beyens et al., 2022; Pouwels et al., 2023). For many adolescents, online interactions provide emotional reassurance and a feeling of being understood, which can reduce loneliness and everyday stress.

However, research consistently shows that problematic or addictive social media use is associated with lower subjective happiness and poorer quality of life. Excessive engagement often amplifies negative emotions such as anxiety, envy, and dissatisfaction, particularly when adolescents engage in constant social comparison or experience online pressure (Twenge et al., 2024; Reddy & Rao, 2024). Indian studies similarly report that adolescents with higher levels of problematic social media use tend to experience reduced life satisfaction and emotional well-being (Singh & Srivastava, 2023).

Social media contributes positively to adolescent happiness when it promotes meaningful social engagement and peer support. Online platforms can reduce social isolation and loneliness by helping adolescents maintain friendships and form new connections, especially for those who find offline social interactions challenging (Beyens et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2023). This sense of connectedness satisfies the fundamental human need for relatedness and is closely linked to higher levels of happiness.

Discussion

Synthesis of Findings: Integrating Complex and Contradictory Evidence

This review highlights that the impact of social media on adolescents is neither uniformly harmful nor entirely beneficial. Rather, social media emerges as a powerful and multifaceted tool whose influence depends on *how*, *why*, and *by whom* it is used. On one hand, social media provides adolescents with unprecedented opportunities for social connection, self-expression, and identity exploration. These can foster a sense of belongingness, facilitate peer support, and offer information and coping resources. On the other hand, the same platforms can heightened vulnerabilities related to self-esteem, body image, emotional regulation, and mental health.

A key insight from recent literature is the growing shift away from viewing "screen time" as the primary indicator of harm. Increasingly, research emphasizes that the quality and context of engagement, along with individual differences, emotional regulation skills and self-concept clarity, are more critical determinants of outcomes. Passive usage, problematic use, and over reliance on social media for emotional coping emerge as risk factors associated with anxiety, depression, reduced well-being, and emotional instability.

The individualized and sometimes contradictory effects of social media suggest that no single solution—such as bans—can adequately address the challenges adolescents face. Instead, effective responses must be multidimensional and coordinated across families, schools, policymakers, and digital platforms. Understanding the complex pathways through which social media influences adolescent development allows the discussion to move beyond problem identification toward a broader, integrated societal response.

The dual effects of social media across key dimensions of adolescent well-being are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Social Media's Effects on Adolescent Well-being Dimensions

Well-being Dimension	Key Positive Effects	Key Negative Effects
Self-Concept & Identity	Self-expression, identity exploration, authentic self-presentation, enhanced self-concept clarity	Reduced self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, identity distress, appearance-based comparison, cyberbullying
Emotional Maturity & Regulation	Mood regulation, stress relief, improved emotional awareness (with moderate use), empathy development	Heightened emotional sensitivity, poor emotion regulation, anxiety and depressive symptoms, problematic use
Mental Health	Social support, reduced isolation, access to coping strategies and mental health resources	Depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, cyberbullying, sleep disruption, disordered eating, addictive patterns
Happiness & Overall Well-being	Enhanced quality of life, social engagement, reduced loneliness and stress	Reduced offline engagement, emotional detachment, fear of missing out (FOMO), compulsive use, lower life satisfaction

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this review align strongly with Self-Determination Theory, which postulates that psychological well-being depends on the satisfaction of basic needs for

relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Social media can satisfy adolescents' need for relatedness by facilitating connection and peer validation. However, excessive focus on external approval, constant comparison, and algorithm-driven feedback can undermine autonomy and competence, leading to emotional distress and reduced well-being.

The Social Comparison Theory, illustrates how digital platforms intensify comparisons with idealized and often unrealistic portrayals. This environment increases the likelihood of dissatisfaction with one's appearance and self-worth, particularly during adolescence, a period already marked by identity sensitivity.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and emotion regulation frameworks. Rather than relying solely on external controls such as restrictions or monitoring, the literature suggests that strengthening adolescents' internal capacities—such as emotional awareness, impulse control, and resilience—may be more effective in helping them navigate digital environments safely and adaptively.

Practical Implications

Given the nuanced nature of social media's impact, promoting adolescent well-being requires a multi-stakeholder approach.

For Parents and Educators: The emphasis should shift from merely limiting screen time to fostering digital literacy, critical thinking, and emotion regulation skills. Open communication about online experiences, encouragement of authentic self-expression, and guidance in managing peer pressure can help adolescents develop a healthier self-concept. Supporting offline relationships, physical activity, and healthy sleep routines is particularly important, as sleep disruption consistently mediates negative mental health outcomes.

Implications for Counsellors and Social Workers: School counsellors and social workers play a significant role in promoting healthy digital behaviour among adolescents. Interventions may focus on psychoeducation, emotional regulation skills, media literacy, and strengthening self-esteem. School-based preventive programs can help reduce problematic social media use and improve adolescent well-being.

For Policymakers: The evidence challenges the effectiveness of bans or overly restrictive policies, which often lack empirical support and may inadvertently increase isolation or resistance. Instead, policy efforts should focus on promoting healthy usage patterns, integrating digital literacy and well-being education into school curriculum, and regulating harmful content and unrealistic body standards in online advertising.

Conclusion

Social media is a pervasive force in adolescents' lives, profoundly shaping self-concept, emotional maturity, mental health, and happiness. This review highlights a complex landscape where positive effects—such as enhanced social connection, self-expression, and access to support—coexist with risks, including body dissatisfaction, reduced self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and vulnerability to cyberbullying.

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A Study on Work-life Conditions, Health Issues and Social Welfare of Women Workers in Tea Garden Communities: A Study in Selected Tea Estates of Dibrugarh District, Assam

Himaloy Barik[1]
Wahengbam Priyalakshmi[2]
Jesmine Baruah[3]
Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Saxena[4]

Abstract:

Assam is known worldwide for its tea. The tea industry is the backbone of Assam's economy and plays a significant role in the nation's economy. Tea garden workers play a major role in the tea industry. Despite their hard work, their health and socio-economic conditions remain poor. Women workers in tea gardens play a vital role by working hard in the tea garden while also managing family responsibilities, balancing both roles to support their families and sustain their livelihoods. Women workers mostly suffer from poor wages, long working hours, inadequate access to healthcare, and unhygienic practices, such as lack of sanitation, and are compounded by limited awareness of hygiene and nutrition. The government and management have initiated various health policies to support them, but more research is needed to address proper healthcare issues, such as common diseases, menstruation, hygiene, and women's health, which are important and should be prioritised. The study focuses on health challenges among women working in Tea Gardens and examines how the socio-economic factors affect the health of the women workers. It aims to identify the common health problems among women tea garden workers and to analyse how the socio-economic has an impact on the health of the women's workers. Further, the study also aims to provide recommendations for improving healthcare for women tea garden workers. Both secondary and primary data are used for the research.

Keywords: *Tea Garden, Women Worker, Common Disease, Health Challenges, Hygiene Measures*

Introduction

Health is all about the body, mind and social feeling good whereas hygiene refers to staying healthy and avoiding sickness by keeping oneself clean. World Health

[1] Himaloy Barik, Research Scholar, Assam University (A Central University), Silchar, Assam, Email: himaloybarik2017@gmail.com, M. No: +91 9678359559 ORCID ID: 0009-0004-8277-7020

[2] Wahengbam Priyalakshmi, Research Scholar, Assam University (A Central University), Silchar, Assam, Email: wahengbampriyalakshmi@gmail.com, M. No: +91 9366742270 ORCID ID: 0009-0004-1596-2138

[3] Jesmine Baruah, Research Scholar, Assam University (A Central University), Silchar, Assam, Email: jesminebaruah4977@gmail.com M. No: +919954915251ORCID ID: 0009-0009-0412-969x

[4] Prof. Sanjeev Kumar Saxena, Professor, Assam University (A Central University), Silchar, Assam, Email: saxenaprerak@rediffmail.com M. No: +91 8191077722 ORCID ID:0000-0002-2139-9255

Organisation defined health as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Assam, a state in the northeastern part of India known for its tea production relies greatly on the tea garden labourers especially the women workers for its huge production. Although the women workers play a very important role in the industry, significant health challenges are faced by the workers due to poverty, difficult working conditions, limited access to health care and the persistence of traditional practices. The plantation workers and families often face health problem which are linked together at the same time. This is because of the hard work, low pay, poor living conditions, weak health services, gender and social inequality (Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020). Awareness of hygiene and health-related issues is also not available due to less educated workers and more numbers of dropouts, which throws a lot of disadvantages and drawbacks for the future generation (Udayanga et al., 2024). The health problems of the tea garden workers are deeply rooted in the social and labour environment and not simply because of the individual choices.

Interventions that focus only on personal behaviour are unlikely to be enough unless they are paired with better preventive and primary care, sanitation, nutrition support, occupational safety, alcohol harm reduction, education, and enforcement of worker welfare protections (Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020). Socio-economic factors such as income, education, and living conditions are very important for shaping health outcomes of the tea estate workers. The study delves into the health realities of women in Achabam, Dirial (Old Division), and Teenali Tea Estates in Dibrugarh, known as India's tea city. By investigating the prevalence of common health issues, comparing traditional and modern healthcare approaches, and analysing the impact of socio-economic factors, the research aims to identify key barriers to women's health and recommend strategies to improve their overall well-being within the tea garden community. Through these objectives, the research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the health challenges faced by women in tea gardens and provide actionable solutions for improvement.

Research Questions

a) What are the most common health challenges women in Tea Gardens face?
b) What socio-economic factors influence the health of women in Tea Gardens?
c) How can healthcare access and health outcomes for women in Tea Garden be improved?

Objectives of the Study

a) To identify the common health challenges faced by women Tea garden workers.
b) To analyse the socio-economic factors that influence the health of the women working in Tea gardens.
c) To recommend ways for improving the health of the women workers.

Methodology

The paper uses both primary and secondary data. The Primary data was collected from women tea workers in Achabam T.E., Dirial T.E. (Old Division), and Teenali T.E. of Dibrugarh District. Population, Health, and disease-related data were collected from the Garden Medical and management. Secondary data was obtained from various sources, such as books, journals, and research articles. This comprehensive approach ensured a thorough understanding of their health and working conditions.

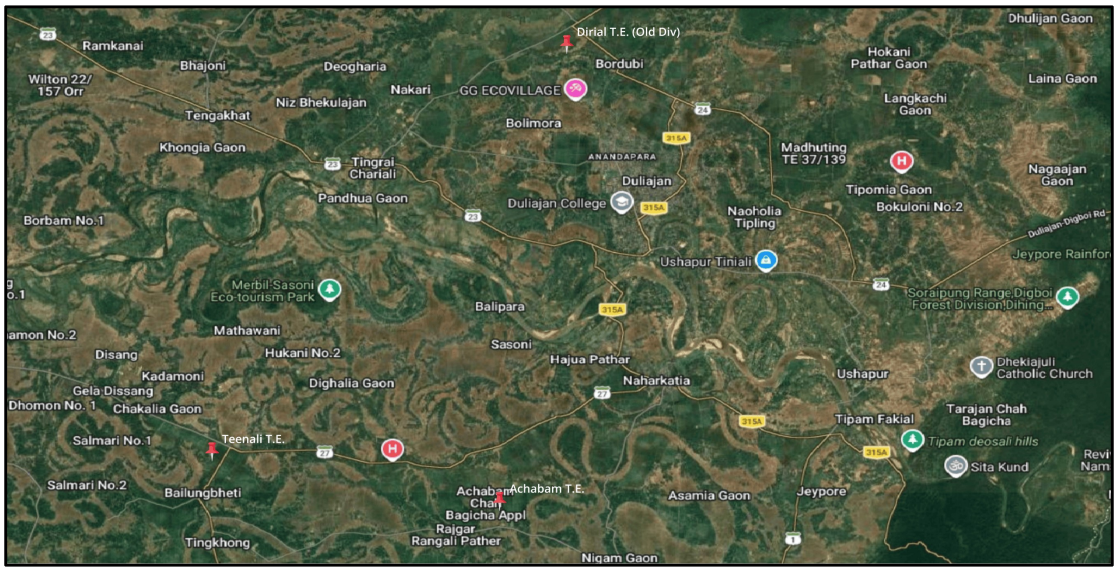
Sample & Sampling Techniques

For this study, in-depth interviews were conducted among female tea workers to gain a deeper understanding of their health issues, socio-economic conditions, their expectations, and experiences naturally. Three tea gardens were selected for the study, and 10 female workers were purposively selected from each tea garden.

Study area:

The study area is located in the Dibrugarh district of Upper Assam, which lies in the Brahmaputra River basin and is famously known as the "Tea City of India." Dibrugarh is surrounded by lush tea gardens. Dibrugarh is home to numerous historical landmarks, including temples and colonial heritage. Tinsukia district is located in the east of Dibrugarh, while Sivasagar and Charaideo districts lie to the southwest. To the north, it shares boundaries with Dhemaji and Lakhimpur districts. For this study, three tea estates have been selected as samples: Achabam Tea Estate, Dirial Tea Estate (Old Division), and Teenali Tea Estate of Dibrugarh district.

Figure 1. *Locations of the surveyed tea gardens.*



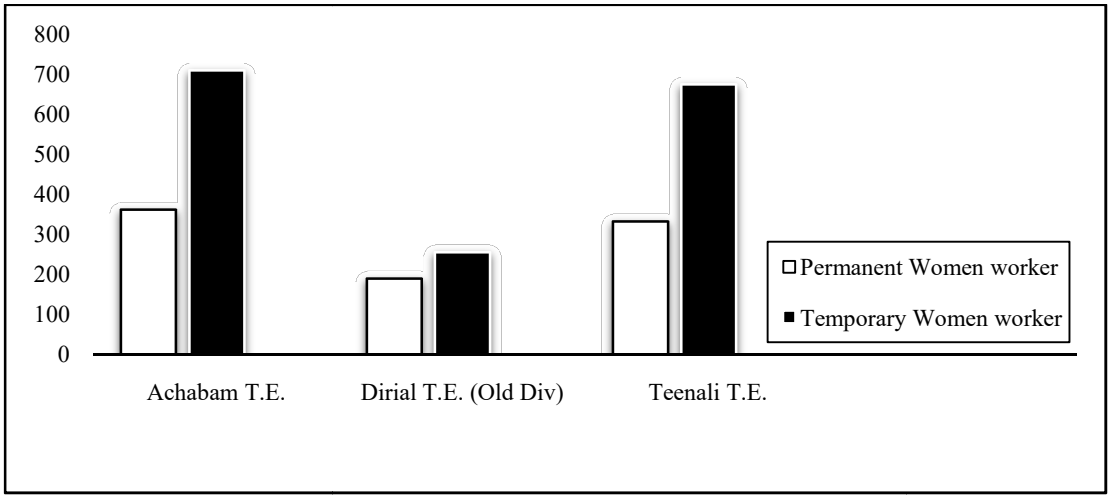
Note: Developed by the authors using QGIS based on Google Earth satellite imagery.

Table 1.*Total number of women workers in the selected tea gardens*

Name of Tea Estates	Achabam T.E.	Dirial T.E. (Old Division)	Teenali T.E.
No. of Women worker	**1071**	**446**	**1007**
Permanent	362	190	333
Temporary	709	256	674

Note: The table presents Primary data collected from Garden Management

Figure 2. *Total number of women workers in the selected tea gardens*



Note: Ratio of Permanent & Temporary women workers

Findings and Discussion

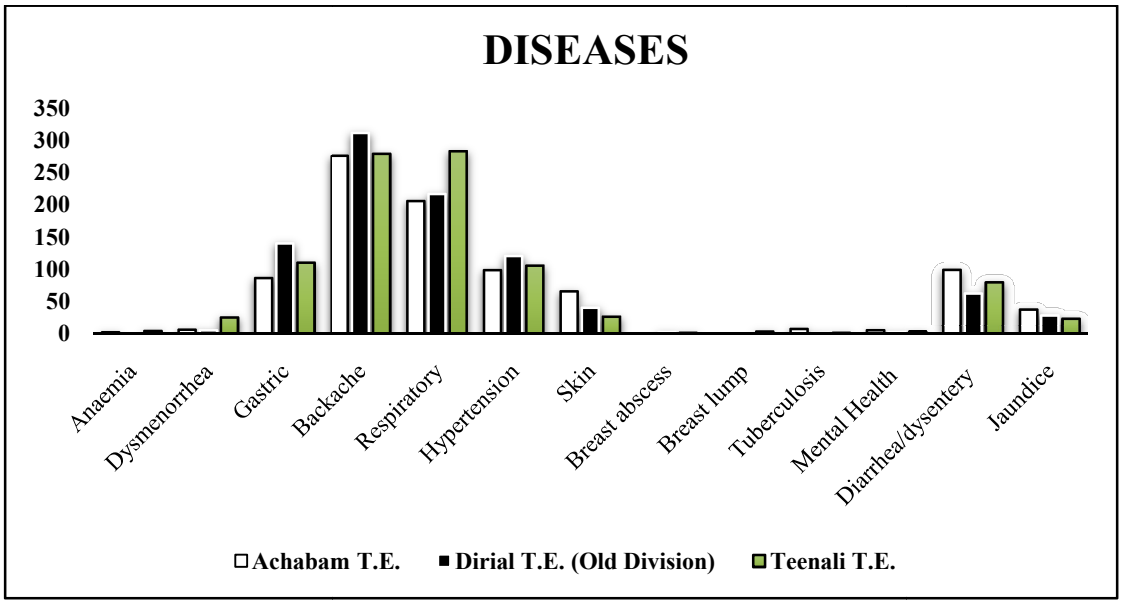
Tea garden women in Assam often face significant health challenges. While health encompasses not just the absence of disease but also overall physical, mental, and social well-being, these women experience significant health disparities. Women in tea tribes often face poor health due to low socio-economic conditions, illiteracy, and overcrowded, unhygienic living environments, making them prone to diseases and malnutrition. Additionally, Cultural factors like superstitions, alcoholism, and social prejudices further worsen their health. Women, who constitute a significant portion of the tea garden workforce, often face limited access to maternity benefits despite their crucial role in tea production. The health challenges in the three tea estates, viz. Achabam Tea Estate, Dirial Estate, and Teenali Tea Estate, are observed to be largely similar. The reasons behind these are also similar. The following are the diseases that are found to be prevalent in the three estates, the reports of which are collected from the garden medicals.

Table 2.*Common diseases found among the women workers in the selected tea garden*

Name of Diseases	Achabam T.E. (N)	Achabam T.E. (%)	Dirial T.E. (Old Division) (N)	Dirial T.E. (Old Division) (%)	Teenali T.E. (N)	Teenali T.E. (%)
Anaemia	2	0.18	-	0.0	4	0.4
Dysmenorrhea	6	0.56	5	1.12	25	2.5
Gastric	86	8.02	140	31.4	110	11
Backache	275	25.67	310	69.5	278	27.6
Respiratory	205	19.14	216	48.43	282	28
Hypertension	98	9.15	120	26.90	105	10.42
Skin	65	6.06	40	9.0	26	2.6
Breast abscess	-	0.0	2	0.44	1	0.1
Breast lump	-	0.0	-	0.0	3	0.3
Tuberculosis	7	0.65	1	0.22	1	0.1
Mental Health	5	0.46	2	0.44	2	0.2
Diarrhea/ Dysentery	98	9.15	62	13.90	79	7.8
Jaundice	38	3.54	29	6.50	24	2.4

Note: Primary Data collected from Garden Medical, 2026

Figure 2*. Common diseases found among the women workers in the selected tea garden*



Note: Occurrence of diseases among the women tea garden workers.

The analysis of the health conditions among women workers in the three tea estates reveals significant occupational health challenges. Backache and respiratory issues are the most common diseases, indicating the physical strain of labour and environmental exposures. Dirial T.E. shows the highest overall disease prevalence, particularly for backache (69.5%), gastric problems (31.4%), and respiratory issues (48.4%), reflecting poor working conditions and higher stress levels. Anaemia, tuberculosis, and skin conditions show varying prevalence among women workers in the studied tea estates. Anaemia is rare (0.18–0.4%) but indicates nutritional deficiencies which require better diets and supplements. Tuberculosis, though it is low compared to the others (0.1–0.65%), highlights the need for early detection and improved housing conditions to prevent spread. Skin conditions are more common, particularly in Dirial T.E. (9.0%), due to exposure to irritants and poor hygiene. Protective clothing, clean water, and regular health check-ups are essential to address these issues effectively.

Anaemia: Today, anaemia is much less common among tea garden workers. It is mainly caused by poor diets, infections, heavy menstruation, pregnancy issues, family history, heavy workloads, and lack of proper healthcare. Over the years, awareness about health and better nutrition has helped reduce the number of these health cases. In the three tea estates studied, only two or three women are affected by anaemia. Only 0.18% of women in Achabam T.E. and 0.4% in Teenali T.E. are affected, with no cases reported in Dirial T.E.

Dysmenorrhea: Dysmenorrhea, or painful menstruation, is a common issue among women working in tea gardens, often caused by strenuous physical labour, poor nutrition, and lack of medical care. Heavy workloads during menstruation, combined with inadequate rest and unhygienic conditions, worsen the pain. Many women have limited access to sanitary products or proper menstrual hygiene, which further aggravates their condition. In the tea estates studied, dysmenorrhea affects 0.56% of women in Achabam T.E., 1.12% in Dirial T.E., and 2.5% in Teenali T.E., with the highest prevalence in Teenali. Despite its prevalence, dysmenorrhea is often ignored due to cultural stigma and lack of awareness among the tea garden workers, especially women workers.

Gastric: Gastric issues among tea garden labourers are largely caused due to poor nutrition, irregular meal times, and excessive tea consumption on an empty stomach which increases gastric acid production. Workers often suffer from stomach problems due to inadequate food eating at odd hours and drinking too much tea without food. In the tea estates studied, gastric problems affect 8.02% of women in Achabam T.E., 31.4% in Dirial T.E., and 11% in Teenali T.E., with the highest prevalence in Dirial, which indicates significant dietary challenges in the particular estate.

Backache: Tea garden workers often suffer from backaches due to long hours of bending and repetitive movements while plucking leaves. Carrying heavy baskets on their backs adds extra strain, especially without proper tools to support them. Poor nutrition weakens their muscles and bones, making them more vulnerable to pain.

Uneven terrain and lack of rest breaks during work make the problem worse. In the three estates, backache affects 25.67% of women in Achabam T.E., 69.5% in Dirial T.E., and 27.6% in Teenali T.E., with Dirial showing the highest prevalence. Older workers and those with untreated injuries are particularly at risk, emphasizing the need for functional interventions and improved working conditions.

Respiratory: Tea garden workers often have respiratory problems during certain seasons. This happens because they are exposed to dust, chemicals like pesticides and smoke from cooking with wood or coal. Their homes often have poor ventilation, making it worse. Changes in weather, like winter or summer seasons, can trigger asthma, coughs, or other lung issues. Many workers don't get enough healthy food, which compels their bodies to becomeweaker, and they can't fight infections well. In the tea estates, respiratory issues affect 19.14% of women in Achabam T.E., 48.43% in Dirial T.E., and 28% in Teenali T.E., with Dirial having the highest percentage. Using masks, giving them better healthcare, and vaccines can help prevent these problems.

Hypertension: Hypertension or high blood pressure is one of the most prominent diseases in allthree estates. Eating too much salt, often raw with rice and hot water, a lack of nutritious food in their diet, excessive alcohol consumption and improper medications are the reasons for high blood pressure or hypertension. In the estates, hypertension affects 9.15% in Achabam T.E., 26.9% in Dirial T.E., and 10.42% in Teenali T.E., with Dirial showing a significantly higher prevalence. Many of them smoke and drink alcohol, which worsens their condition.

Skin Diseases and breast abscesses: Tea Garden women labourers often suffer from various skin diseases and breast abscesses due to a mix of environmental and health factors. Wearing tripal (tarpaulin) for long periods while plucking tea leaves in the sun and rain can cause skin irritation, rashes, and fungal infections. Prolonged sun exposure and contact with chemicals like pesticides also contribute to skin problems. Skin diseases affect 6.06% in Achabam T.E., 9.0% in Dirial T.E., and 2.6% in Teenali T.E. At the same time, breast abscesses are less common, with 0.44% in Dirial and 0.1% in Teenali T.E. Proper hygiene, protective clothing, and healthcare are essential to prevent these issues.

Tuberculosis (TB): TB is a serious problem for women working in tea gardens, but the number of affected patients has reduced in recent times. Crowded homes, dusty work areas, and smoke from fires used for cooking affect their lungs. Many women have weak bodies due to poor food and drinking alcohol, which makes them more likely to get sick. In the estates studied, TB affects 0.65% of women in Achabam T.E. and 0.22% in Dirial T.E., with 0.1% in Teenali T.E. Efforts like better healthcare, education, and awareness about TB are helping more women get treated early.

Waterborne Diseases: Workers highlighted the lack of clean drinking water and poor sanitation, which contribute to the spread of waterborne diseases like diarrhoea and dysentery. These diseases affect 9.15% of women in Achabam T.E., 13.9% in Dirial

T.E., and 7.8% in Teenali T.E., showing that sanitation and access to clean water remain critical health concerns.

Mental Health Issues: Many workers spoke about the emotional strain caused by isolation, long working hours, and economic hardship. These factors contribute to feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, and tiredness. In the estates, mental health issues affect 0.46% of women in Achabam T.E., 0.44% in Dirial T.E., and 0.2% in Teenali T.E. The lack of access to mental health support makes it harder for workers to cope with their stress and other mental problems, emphasising the need for counselling services and community support initiatives.

Diarrhea/Dysentery: Diarrhea/Dysentery is common among tea garden workers due to dirty water, poor sanitation, and low hygiene. It affects 9.15%of Achabam T.E., 13.9%of Dirial T.E., and 7.8% in Teenali T.E., with Dirial being the worst affected. These diseases cause weakness and dehydration, reducing work capacity. The tea companies and government should provide clean drinking water, better toilets, and hygiene education. Regular health check-ups and quick medical care are essential to prevent and treat these illnesses effectively.

Jaundice: Jaundice affects 3.54% of women in Achabam T.E., 6.5% in Dirial T.E., and 2.4% in Teenali T.E. It is caused by dirty water and poor hygiene. Jaundice makes workers weak and less productive. To prevent it, clean drinking water, better sanitation, health education, regular check-ups, and vaccines are needed, especially in Dirial, where cases are highest.

Health issues and challenges

From the in-depth interviews with the participants, it has been revealed that the women workers suffer from a range of physical and occupational health problems, as reported by the respondents selected for the research. Several previous studies have highlighted the health issues and challenges faced by women tea garden workers in India, particularly in Assam and Bengal. These studies reveal that women workers are vulnerable to various occupational, nutritional, reproductive and socio-economic problems due to poor living and hard-working conditions. Therefore, findings of the present study are consistent with previous research, indicating that health- related challenges continue to remain a major concern among tea garden workers.

a) Lack of Proper Hygiene Practices: Many tea estate workers neglect washing their hands due to inadequate access to clean water or a lack of awareness, leading to hygiene-related problems. A previous study also found that only 33% of people had an unshared sanitary latrine, and just 16.8% practiced safe disposal of child faeces and water scarcity in hilly plantation areas was also identified as part of the problem (Islam & Biswas, 2024)**.**

b) Inadequate Sanitation: The absence of proper sanitation facilities results in some workers defecating in the fields, creating unsanitary conditions that can affect both health and the workplace environment. In an earlier study, it was reported that about

70% of families used unsafe latrines, including many open pits, and that many lacked proper floors or walls, showing how basic sanitation infrastructure itself remains weak (Md. Farid Uddin et al., 2011).

c) Risky Breastfeeding Practices: After working long hours in the fields under the sun, workers may breastfeed without washing their bodies or breasts, posing health risks to both mother and child and the respondent reported that there are no scientific modern restroom facilities. More recent accounts similarly note that workers are often not provided with sanitation and easy restroom access during long workdays, posing a risk during breastfeeding (khan et al, 2023).

d) Overexposure to the Sun: Researchers observed that Prolonged exposure to intense sunlight during fieldwork increases the risk of heat-related illnesses, dehydration, and long-term skin issues in workers. It was noted that workers drank salted tea to endure scorching sunlight while plucking leaves, showing how routine sun stress becomes part of survival at work (M. Kamruzzaman et al., 2015).

e) Limited Access to Menstrual Hygiene Products: Many workers use cloth instead of sanitary pads during menstruation, which heightens the risk of infections due to poor menstrual hygiene management. Earlier studies reported that women and adolescent girls may have to manage menstruation without enough clean water, private space, safe sanitation or sanitary materials, and cultural taboos can stop them from seeking help (Amin et al., 2025).

f) Poor Nutrition: Limited access to nutritious food impacts workers' health, weakening their immune systems and reducing overall well-being. Among workers, under nutrition is common: one study found that 36% of tea garden workers had a BMI below 18.5 and described a “vicious cycle” in which under nutrition, micronutrient deficiency, infection, poverty, and unhygienic environments reinforce each other (Yasmin et al., 2022). Women appear especially vulnerable, reports describe inadequate nutrition among female labourers, irregular meals, and poor dietary intake linked with low wages, early marriage, communicable diseases and weak health service. (Umamaheswari & Saradha, 2022).

g) Excessive alcohol: Some tea garden workers consume excessive alcohol to cope with various difficulties that they face in their lives, such as financial instability, poor health, and tiredness due to vigorous physical activity and other challenges. Due to excessive alcohol consumption, various health issues like liver damage, heart and digestive issues may arise, which deteriorate or weaken the immune system. One previous study found that 43% of tea garden workers and addiction to tobacco or alcohol, even in a workforce with a strong female presence, suggesting that substance use is not limited to men alone (Yasmin et al., 2022)The literature also argues that access to alcohol cessation and harm-reduction services should be part of plantation health programs, rather than treating alcohol use as a separate personal failing (Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020).

h) Short birth Intervals: A lack of access to family planning resources or awareness results in short gaps between the birth of children, negatively affecting maternal and child health. Some tea garden workers relyon superstitious practices instead of seeking medical help due to a lack of awareness, cultural beliefs, financial issues, and limited access to healthcare. The workers delay and worsen their health problems by visiting faith healers, performing rituals or even using unproven remedies.

i) Malnutrition: It became clear that many workers live in poverty and have limited access to nutritious food. This poor diet leads to malnutrition, weakening their immunity and affecting their overall health, including their ability to stay healthy during pregnancies and the growth of their children. Community level accounts also note very high anaemia among women and high malnutrition among children living in plantation labour lines under poor social and hygienic conditions (Dowarah, 2023).

j) Musculoskeletal Disorders: Workers shared that the repetitive and physically demanding tasks of plucking tea leaves for long hours often lead to back pain, joint pain, and wrist injuries. Bending and carrying heavy loads also take a toll on their bodies. Previous studies also reported that musculoskeletal pain is one of the major problems. Recent evidence found musculoskeletal disorders in 77.6% of tea garden workers, with lower back pain the most common complaint (Gupta et al., 2025). Frequent hand pain, leg pain, weakness, headache, and chest pain among women workers, which fits with the strain of repetitive manual labour and carrying loads over rough terrain (Helanjanani, 2022)(Chandrasekara et al., 2020)

k) Reproductive Health Issues: Many women mentioned struggling with reproductive health problems due to poor sanitation facilities, early marriages, and frequent pregnancies. They also face a lack of proper prenatal and postnatal care, which leads to complications during and after childbirth. Previous studies describe that women workers may have to keep working through menstruation, pregnancy, and child-rearing with little privacy, poor restroom access, and long hours in the fields, which makes basic self-care much harder (khan et al, 2023).

Suggestions

Addressing these challenges requires better housing, access to healthcare, and awareness programs to improve their overall well-being and quality of life. The Following are some suggestions provided by the study:

a) Handwashing practices and installing water taps: The government and companies should install water taps for handwashing in tea plantation areas and conduct awareness campaigns, while workers should ensure regular hand washing before meals and after using the toilet.

b) Sanitation in the Workplace: The government and companies should construct sanitation infrastructure in every tea plantation area and maintain toilet facilities to

prevent open defecation and urinal use. The workers should consistently use these facilities to maintain hygiene.

c) Hygiene during breastfeeding: Hygiene during breastfeeding is crucial for the health of both mothers and babies. Companies should install or construct proper breastfeeding rooms in tea plantation areas. These facilities would provide privacy and comfort for mothers, encouraging them to practice good hygiene and care for their infants effectively. Such initiatives not only improve maternal and child health but also create a supportive work environment for women in tea gardens.

d) Changing room: Changing rooms for women workers in tea plantations are important for their comfort and privacy. These rooms will help them change clothes during rainy or hot weather, keeping them clean and dry. Proper changing facilities can also improve hygiene and prevent health problems caused by wearing wet or sweaty clothes for long hours. This simple step can make the workplace more comfortable and supportive for women workers.

e) Protection against sun exposure: Employers should provide protective gear like hats, long sleeves, and sunscreen, and create shaded rest areas; workers should use the provided gear and take breaks to avoid excessive sun exposure.

f) Menstrual hygiene management: Authorities should distribute affordable or free sanitary pads and conduct awareness programs, while workers should adopt proper menstrual hygiene practices.

g) Access to nutritious food: Companies should implement meal programs and educate on nutrition, while workers should include locally available nutritious foods in their diet.

h) Family planning and maternal health: Employers should ensure access to family planning resources, regular health checkups, and counselling, while workers should use these services to plan childbirth and prioritize maternal health.

i) Avoid alcohol: Women workers should avoid alcohol because it can harm their health and cause problems during pregnancy. Drinking too much alcohol can damage the liver, weaken the body and make it harder for the woman to have a healthy baby. It can also affect the baby's growth and development. To stay healthy, women can try other ways to reduce stress, like talking with friends, doing simple exercises, or spending time with family.

j) Awareness campaign for government schemes: The Government of Assam, through the Directorate of Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare, has started a scheme to help tea garden workers from the Tea Tribes and Adivasi communities with medical expenses. This scheme provides a one-time grant, varying by disease or medical condition, to improve treatment. The government and tea garden management should work together to spread awareness through meetings, posters, and workshops. Creating such awareness will empower workers to access timely medical support and improve their overall well-being**.**

Table 3.*Grants to patients suffering from major diseases*

SL/No	Name of the Diseases	Amount
1	Eye Diseases	**Rs. 5,000**
2	TB (Tuberculosis)/Eye Cataract	**Rs. 10,000**
3	Accident	**Rs. 15,000**
4	Autoimmune Diseases/Liver Diseases/ Nerve Disorders/Cancer/Kidney Diseases/ Dialysis/Major Operations/Bone Diseases like Rheumatoid Arthritis/Bone Fractures &Elephantiasis	**Rs. 50,000**
5	Heart Diseases/Strokes	**Rs. 75,000**

Note: Official website of the Directorate of tea tribes and Adivasi Welfare Department of the Government of Assam. (https://sirishassam.in/) *(https://sirishassam.in/home/health_care)*

Conclusion

Women working in Assam's tea gardens face significant health challenges due to poor living conditions, limited access to healthcare, and thephysical demands of their work. Common health issues include anaemia, painful menstruation, respiratory problems, skin problems, backaches, and mental health struggles, all worsened by cultural practices, poor hygiene, and malnutrition. To address these issues, it is crucial to improve the living conditions, provide access to quality healthcare, and raise awareness about nutrition and hygiene. Practical measures, such as installing sanitation facilities, providing sun protection, ensuring access to nutritious meals, and educating workers on menstrual hygiene and family planning, can greatly improve their well-being. Health and hygiene are significant markers of socioeconomic factors. Therefore, important attention should be given to women's health. Both garden management and the government must collaborate to address these issues and implement policies that prioritise the health and welfare of tea garden workers. It is important to raise awareness and educate workers about family planning and the effects of alcohol consumption to improve their long-term health. Further research is required to determine how these changes can improve workers' long-term health and to develop better policies to support the well-being of tea garden workers.

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Empowering Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Training and Skill Development: A Study in Murshidabad District, West Bengal

Tina Sarkar[1]
Prof. Subhabrata Dutta[2]

Abstract

Empowering rural women entrepreneurs is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Women empowerment refers to enhancing women's economic independence, decision-making ability, social participation and access to resources and opportunities. Entrepreneurship development among rural women has become an important strategy for achieving socio-economic empowerment and sustainable livelihood generation in India. The main objective of Women Entrepreneurship is to widen women's participation in all areas of activities in economic, social and political life which provides rural women with opportunities to become self-reliant and financially secure. Skill development and training programmes plays a significant role in enhancing women's entrepreneurial capabilities and financial independence. The present study examines the role of Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore in empowering rural women entrepreneurs in Murshidabad district of West Bengal through vocational training programmes and skill development. The findings suggested that entrepreneurship and vocational training programmes significantly enhanced women's technical skills, self-confidence, financial literacy, leadership qualities, and decision-making ability that positively contribute towards self-employment generation and sustainable livelihood development. Along with that improvement in household income, financial independence, savings behaviour and social participation is observed among rural women beneficiaries. So, institutional training programmes play a transformative role in promoting women empowerment and rural economic development.

Keywords: *Income Generation, Training, Skill Development, Empowerment, Women Entrepreneurs*

Introduction

A country's economic progress is found to be positively correlated with the rise in number and quality of its entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurship as one of the determining factors in the creation of new wealth in society has since long back been recognised (McClelland, 1996; Guilder, 1984; Drucker, 1985; Mohanty 2005; Nandan 2013, Dutta & Chongtham 2013). India is principally an agriculture-based nation around 70% of the people depend on agriculture and allied activities in rural areas. For agricultural development in rural India, almost 80% of women are occupied and

[1] Tina Sarkar, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar. Mobile No.: 8250898722. Email: sarkartina1998@gmail.com

[2] Prof. Subhabrata Dutta, Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar. Mobile No. 940153340. Email: sduttasw@gmail.com

dependent. Rural women play a key role in supporting their households and communities in achieving food and nutrition security, generating income and improving rural livelihoods and overall well-being.

With the growing realisation of importance of entrepreneurship in the state of dragon of unemployment in the country, it is given more importance, and the stress and emphasis is now more upon women entrepreneurs as their contribution, participation as a percentage to total human effort is very low. It has been rightly stated by Pandit Jawarhalal Nehru 'in order to awaken the people it is the women who have to be awakened. Once she is on move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves' (cited from Swarajyalakshmi, 1998, Desai 2011). Presently women entrepreneurs encompass about 10% of the total entrepreneurs in India and this percentage is growing every year. They are capable of versatile qualities and the role of women in society also started changing day by day. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly engaging in activities such as tailoring, handicrafts, food processing, beauty care, dairy farming, and other home-based enterprises that strengthen rural economic growth and financial independence (Deka, 2018).

Growth of women entrepreneurship would be supplementary and complementary for women in particular and for the country in general. On one hand, their enthusiasm and skills in constructive performance is met and simultaneously they can earn enough for proper maintenance and improvement of their socio-economic status. On the other side, this work force in production process will enrich the national economy by way of ensuring optimum utilisation of human and material resources for adequate employment opportunities. This calls for promoting congenial environment for fostering entrepreneurship among women (Dutta, 2018).

Empowering rural women entrepreneurs is essential for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Women empowerment refers to enhancing women's economic independence, decision-making ability, social participation, and access to resources and opportunities. The main objective of Women Entrepreneurship was to widen women's participation in all areas of activities in economical, social and political life which provides rural women with opportunities to become self-reliant and financially secure (Vajaya, 2012; Dutta, 2013). Women-led enterprises not only improve family income but also contribute to education, healthcare, nutrition, and community welfare. According to Pandhare et al. (2024), entrepreneurial intervention positively influences women's income, savings, confidence, leadership qualities, and social participation. Entrepreneurship also helps women overcome social and economic dependency by creating employment opportunities and strengthening their role in society.

Skill development and entrepreneurship training play a crucial role in promoting women entrepreneurship in rural areas. Many rural women possess traditional skills but lack technical knowledge, entrepreneurial guidance, financial literacy, and market exposure. Skill training programmes help women acquire vocational competencies, business management skills, communication ability, and financial awareness

necessary for enterprise development. Entrepreneurship training also increases self-confidence, leadership qualities, and decision-making power among women entrepreneurs. Studies have shown that entrepreneurship and skill development programmes significantly improve women's employability and livelihood opportunities in rural India (Ghosh & Neogi, 2018).

In this context, RUDSETI (Rural Development and Self Employment Training Institute) plays an important role in promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment among rural women. RUDSETI was established to provide free entrepreneurship development and vocational training programmes for unemployed youth and women. The institute offers practical training, business guidance, counselling, follow-up support, and financial linkage assistance to encourage self-employment and Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises development. Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Berhampore located in Murshidabad district of West Bengal, has been actively involved in promoting women entrepreneurship through skill training programmes. According to the Activities Report 2024–25, the institute conducted 31 Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) and trained more than 1000 beneficiaries through various vocational and entrepreneurship activities. The institute also organized awareness camps, follow-up meetings, and enterprise counselling programmes to encourage self-employment among rural women. The major training areas included tailoring, beautician courses, food processing, handicrafts, mushroom cultivation, poultry farming, and other micro-enterprise activities suitable for women entrepreneurs. According to Murshidabad district demographic statistics nearly 80 % of the population resides in rural areas, where agriculture and informal economic activities remain the major sources of livelihood. Due to limited industrialization and employment opportunities, many rural women remain economically dependent on family members. Entrepreneurship and skill development programmes create opportunities for rural women to establish Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises based enterprises and improve their socio-economic conditions. The district also has a large population of economically weaker sections and women with limited access to higher education, financial institutions, and employment opportunities. In such a socio-economic environment, entrepreneurship training institutions like Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore play a significant role in developing entrepreneurial ability and promoting sustainable livelihood generation among women.

Review of Literature

Recent studies have highlighted the significant role of entrepreneurship and skill development programmes in empowering rural women entrepreneurs in India. Researchers have emphasized that entrepreneurship training enhances women's economic independence, self-confidence, leadership qualities, and sustainable livelihood opportunities. Deka (2018) describe that skill development programmes improve entrepreneurial competency and create self-employment opportunities for

rural women by enhancing vocational and technical skills. Similarly, Ghosh & Neogi (2018) stated that entrepreneurship contributes positively toward financial inclusion, decision-making ability, and socio-economic empowerment among women entrepreneurs in rural areas. Khan et al. (2023) further highlighted that entrepreneurial intervention positively influences women's income generation, leadership qualities, and social participation, thereby strengthening both economic and psychological empowerment.

Senapati & Ojha (2019) found that entrepreneurship and self-employment activities create sustainable livelihood opportunities and reduce economic dependency among rural women. Pandhare et al. (2024) observed that entrepreneurial intervention and participation in self-employment programmes significantly improve women's income, savings behaviour, confidence, leadership qualities, and household decision-making ability. Similarly, Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore, West Bengal (2024) highlighted that skill training programmes enhance enterprise sustainability, employability, and self-reliance among women entrepreneurs. Lakshmi Priya & Bose (2021) stated that entrepreneurship training programmes significantly enhanced vocational skills, business management ability, and entrepreneurial motivation among women trainees. Chethan (2020) analysed entrepreneurship skill development programmes conducted by RUDSETI in Karnataka and reported that practical training methods and enterprise guidance improved trainees' confidence level and readiness for self-employment activities. Kobba et al. (2020) also observed that entrepreneurship training programmes conducted by RUDSETI positively influence entrepreneurial knowledge, practical skill acquisition, and livelihood generation among beneficiaries.

Further, Vanitha & Thriveni (2023) reported that RUDSET initiatives contributed significantly toward women empowerment by improving women's income generation capacity, confidence, leadership ability, and social participation. Shetty et al. (2022) similarly found that entrepreneurship development programmes conducted through RUDSETIs positively affected the economic condition, savings behaviour, and livelihood opportunities of trainees. It also emphasized that entrepreneurship training programmes improve communication ability, self-confidence, and social recognition among rural women entrepreneurs.

Methodology

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the role of RUDSET Institute, Berhampore in promoting women entrepreneurship in Murshidabad district.
2. To identify the types of training attended by the women entrepreneurs.
3. To know the impact of training on the empowerment and skill development of women entrepreneurs.

4. To examine the contribution of entrepreneurship training towards self-employment and sustainable livelihood generation among rural women.

Sampling

The researcher adopted a purposive sampling technique to select respondents directly associated with entrepreneurship and skill development programmes conducted by Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore. A total of 80 women entrepreneurs who received entrepreneurship and vocational training from the institute were selected from different rural areas of Murshidabad district, West Bengal.

Research Design

The present study is based on a descriptive research design. The study attempts to understand the role of entrepreneurship and skill training in empowering rural women entrepreneurs in Murshidabad district. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used to analyse the impact of training programmes on women entrepreneurship, skill development, empowerment, and livelihood generation.

Tools of Data Collection

Primary data were collected directly from the women entrepreneurs through structured interview schedules and personal interaction. Secondary data were collected from the Activities Report 2024–25 of Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore, journals, books, research articles, government reports.

Data Processing and Analysis

The collected data were tabulated and processed with the help of master tables and charts. Data analysis was carried out using percentage analysis, tables, graphs, and descriptive interpretation.

Results & Discussion

The Role of RUDSET Institute Berhampore in Promoting Women Entrepreneurship

The study shows that Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore plays a very important role in helping rural women become entrepreneurs in the Murshidabad district. The institute does this by organizing entrepreneurship development programs, technical skill training, awareness camps, and continuous follow-up support. These initiatives motivate rural women to start self-employment activities and provide them with clear guidance on how to set up

small businesses and earn a steady livelihood. To understand how the institute supports these women, data was collected from a sample of 80 respondents (N=80) and divided into five main areas of support, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Role of RUDSET Institute in Promoting Women Entrepreneurship

Areas of Support	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Entrepreneurship Motivation	19	24
Skill Development	21	26
Financial Awareness	13	16
Self-Employment Guidance	16	20
Follow-up and Counselling	11	14
Total	**80**	**100%**

The findings indicate that Skill Development is considered the most important contribution by 26% (n=21) of the respondents. This shows that practical, hands-on skills are highly valued by women when starting a business. Around 24% (n=19) of the respondents reported that Entrepreneurship Motivation programs gave them the initial confidence to become self-reliant. Furthermore, 20% (n=16) of the women stated that Self-Employment Guidance was crucial in helping them set up concrete business activities like tailoring shops, food processing units and beauty parlours. Lastly, Financial Awareness 16% (n=13) and Follow-up and Counselling 14% (n=11) ensure that the new entrepreneurs receive advice and financial literacy even after their training ends helping their businesses survive the critical first few months.

Types of Training Programs attended by Women Entrepreneurs

The study reveals that women entrepreneurs participate in a variety of vocational and business training programs. Their choices usually depend on their personal interests, local market demands, and the livelihood opportunities available in their villages.

Table 2: Types of Training Attended by Women Entrepreneurs

Types of Training	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Tailoring and Stitching	24	30
Beautician Training	16	20
Food Processing	14	18
Handicrafts and Embroidery	10	13
Poultry and Mushroom Cultivation	8	10
Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP)	8	10
Total	**80**	**100%**

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that Tailoring and Stitching was the most preferred training programme among rural women entrepreneurs attended by 30% (n=24) of the respondents. The popularity of this training is mainly due to its low investment requirement, home-based nature and regular local demand. Beautician Training accounted for 20% (n=16) reflecting the growing demand for beauty and personal care services in rural and semi-urban areas. Food Processing training represented 18% (n=14) of the respondents where as women engaged in activities such as preparing snacks, pickles, bakery products and spices for income generation. Handicrafts and Embroidery training attracted 13% (n=10) respondents while Poultry and Mushroom Cultivation and Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDP) each accounted for 10% (n=8). Overall, the findings reveal that rural women prefer low-cost, skill-based and home-oriented entrepreneurial activities that support self-employment and livelihood generation.

Impact of Training on Empowerment and Skill Development

The analysis proves that receiving entrepreneurship and vocational training brings positive changes to multiple areas of a woman's life. It significantly improves their technical abilities, personal confidence, financial awareness, and social participation.

Table 3: Impact of Training

Areas of Impact	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Improvement in Technical Skills	18	23
Increase in Self-Confidence	16	20
Better Financial Awareness	14	17
Improvement in Decision-Making Ability	10	13
Increase in Income Generation Ability	14	17
Better Social Participation	8	10
Total	**80**	**100%**

The findings in Table 3, presented that entrepreneurship and skill training programmes had a significant impact on the empowerment and skill development of rural women entrepreneurs. About 23% (n=18) of the respondents reported improvement in technical skills after attending training programmes that enabling them to manage entrepreneurial activities more efficiently. An increase in self-confidence was observed among 20% (n=16) of the respondents, which helped them participate actively in business and social activities. Better financial awareness and income generation ability were reported by 17% (n=14) respondents each indicating improvement in banking knowledge, savings behaviour and entrepreneurial income. Further, 13% (n=10) of the respondents experienced improvement in decision-making ability, while 10% (n=8) reported better social participation. The findings clearly show that entrepreneurship training positively contributed toward women empowerment, self-reliance and sustainable livelihood development.

Contribution of Training towards Sustainable Livelihood Generation

Ultimately, the study reveals that entrepreneurship training contributes heavily to self-employment, economic independence, and sustainable livelihood development among rural women.

Table 4: Contribution of Entrepreneurship Training towards Livelihood Generation

Areas of Contribution	Number of Respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Self-Employment Generation	22	27
Increase in Household Income	18	23
Financial Independence	14	17
Improvement in Savings Habit	10	13
Better Standard of Living	8	10
Employment Opportunity for Others	8	10
Total	**80**	**100%**

The findings in Table 4, shows that entrepreneurship training significantly contributed toward livelihood generation and economic empowerment among rural women entrepreneurs. Around 27% (n=22) of the respondent reported that they have benefited with self-employment generation after receiving training from Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore many of them have established small enterprises such as tailoring units, beauty parlours, food processing businesses, handicraft activities. Further, 23% (n=18) of the respondents experienced an Increase in Household Income which improved family financial stability and supported daily household expenses. About 17% (n=14) reported achieving Financial Independence, reducing their dependency on family members for personal and household needs. Improvement in Savings Habits was observed among 13% (n=10) respondents, while 10% (n=8) experienced a Better Standard of Living through improved nutrition, healthcare and educational expenditure. Notably, 10% (n=8) of the women entrepreneurs also generated Employment Opportunities for other rural women thereby contributing to local livelihood development and community empowerment.

Comparative Analysis of Pre- and Post-Training Changes in Socio-Economic Condition of Women Entrepreneurs after Training (N = 80)

Areas of Improvement	Before Training	After Training	Major Changes Observed
Technical Skills	Limited technical and vocational	Improved practical and entrepreneurial	87% women reported skill

	knowledge	skills	improvement
Income Level	Irregular income and financial dependency	Regular income through self-employment	Income increased from ₹2,500 to ₹6,500–₹14,000
Financial Independence	Dependent on family members for financial decisions	Active participation in financial management	77% women became financially independent
Banking and Credit Awareness	Limited banking knowledge and informal borrowing	Better awareness regarding savings and formal loans	63% women accessed formal credit facilities
Confidence and Leadership	Low confidence and limited public participation	Increased confidence and leadership ability	80% women reported improved confidence
Social Participation	Limited social interaction and mobility	Greater participation in SHGs and community activities	70% women experienced better social participation

Conclusion

Empowering women entrepreneurs through skill training can be one of the leading efforts for accelerating economic growth, reducing poverty and developing inclusive societies. It has powerful multiplier effect as when women are equipped with the right skills, they don't just create livelihoods for themselves but reinvest in their families and communities. However, translating training into sustainable business success is a complex journey filled with distinct hurdles and immense possibilities. The study "Empowering Rural Women Entrepreneurs through Training and Skill development: A Study in Murshidabad District, West Bengal" establishes that entrepreneurship and skill-development programmes play a transformative role in enhancing the socio-economic status of rural women. The findings clearly indicate that Rural Development and Self Employment Training (RUDSET) Institute, Berhampore has significantly contributed to women's self-employment, income generation and skill upgrading by providing targeted vocational and entrepreneurship training in areas such as tailoring, beautician services, food processing, handicrafts, poultry and mushroom cultivation and general entrepreneurship development. These low-cost, home-based enterprises have enabled women to become economically active and reduce their dependence on family members.

At present 'skill training' has shifted away from isolated training toward comprehensive incubation. Now a days 'Training' pairing technical skill training with financial literacy, legal guidance for business registration, and direct pathways to micro-loans or angel investors. Accordingly in this study, it has found that the

training has led to measurable improvements in technical skills, self-confidence, financial literacy, decision-making ability, and social participation among the beneficiaries. The comparative analysis shows a substantial rise in income levels, increased financial independence, improved savings behaviour and broader access to formal banking and credit facilities. By creating self-employment opportunities and enabling some women to provide jobs to others the intervention has also strengthened local livelihoods and community resilience. Overall, the study underscores that institutional skill and entrepreneurship-training programmes like those of RUDSET Institute are important platforms for empowering rural women.

However, most of these programs are found to be focusing on traditional, gender-stereotyped skills like sewing, handicrafts, or basic food preservation. Though these are valuable, but markets are frequently saturated and offer low profit margins. Therefore, structural training programs along with technical skills like digital literacy (e-commerce, digital payments), digital marketing, financial management, and advanced manufacturing are needed. For making truly empowered skilled women entrepreneurs Governments, NGOs, and the private sector need to collaborate on flexible, modular schedules and modern training programme combined with technology and credit access which. Can transform women from economic participants into economic leaders.

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Invisible Lives in Urban Spaces: Case Studies of Homeless Narikuravar in Chennai

Jani Esekkial M[1]
Dr. G. Albin Joseph[2]

Abstract

India is a diverse country and it has more than four major language families (Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Sino-Tibetan, and Austric), many cultures shaped by various religions (Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, etc.), and more than 1500 ethnic groups in the country. One such ethnic group is the Narikuravar. The Narikuravar are basically gypsies, a semi-nomadic indigenous group residing in the state of Tamil Nadu, also called Kuruvikarar. A large part of this population has been facing serious housing insecurity in many years, forcing many families to live in public spaces, on pavements, and in temporary settlements in cities like Chennai. Despite they have been in the area for a long time, the living conditions and daily challenges of homeless Narikuravar people are not well mentioned in academic literatures. This study aims to understand daily life experiences of homeless Narikuravar people in Chennai through a case study method as a qualitative approach. Four cases identified using purposive sampling, and data were collected through in-depth interviews and field observations. The cases focus on their pathways into homelessness, livelihood patterns, access to basic services, experiences of exclusion, and everyday survival strategies in the city. The study findings reveal that homelessness among the Narikuravar is not really the result of poverty, but is also closely linked to displacement, absence of identity documents, unsafe livelihoods, and exclusion from the modern society. The cases also highlight difficulties in accessing government welfare schemes, health care, secure shelter and accessing public toilet, even though such services formally exist. By presenting these case studies, the paper aims to bring attention to the invisible lives of homeless Narikuravar people and to contribute to a better understanding of urban homelessness among indigenous and nomadic communities. The study also underlines the need for more inclusive and culturally sensitive policy interventions to address their housing and social protection needs.

Keywords: *Homelessness, Narikuravar, Urban Poverty, Social Exclusion, Nomadic community*

1. Introduction

Urban homelessness in India is poorly studied relative to its scale. The Census of India (2011) counted roughly 1.77 million people without permanent shelter, more than half of them concentrated in urban areas (Banerjee & Bhattacharya, 2018). Research attention has grown in recent decades, though most of it treats homeless populations as an undifferentiated mass. The community-specific texture of social

[1] Jani Esekkial M, PhD Senior Research Fellow, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar – 788011, Email: janiesekkial95@gmail.com

[2] Dr. G. Albin Joseph, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar–788011, Email: albinjosephg@gmail.com

exclusion — the way it plays out differently for nomadic or indigenous groups — has received almost no systematic attention (Roy & Singh, 2017).

The Narikuravar are one such group. A semi-nomadic indigenous community concentrated in Tamil Nadu, they have been pushed to the edges of urban social policy for generations. Their traditional livelihood was hunting, but colonial-era forest laws dismantled that entirely, forcing a shift into informal urban work — beadwork, tattooing, street vending, rag picking (Dragomir & Zafiu, 2019; Rajpriya & Sudarkodi, 2025). For decades, they were classified as Most Backward Class rather than Scheduled Tribe, which meant they were excluded from reservation benefits in education and employment. The reclassification finally came in December 2022, after more than sixty years of advocacy (Dragomir, 2023). Whether that legal change has translated into anything tangible on the ground is, at best, an open question.

In Chennai, many Narikuravar families sleep on pavements, roadsides, and along the beach — behind the Kanagi statue is a well-known spot — and in areas like Thirumullaivoyal and Mappedu (Newsclick, 2020; CSW, 2023). They face routine harassment from authorities and have little reliable access to public services. Media reports have documented cases of Narikuravar being turned away from homeless shelters by other inmates, denied use of public toilets, and treated with open suspicion by the general public. The stigma runs deep, and it shapes nearly every dimension of their daily lives (The News Minute, 2020).

2. Literature review

Rajpriya and Sudarkodi (2025) map the socio-economic conditions of the Narikuravar using secondary data and field records. Poverty is widespread, illiteracy high, child labour common, and social discrimination severe. Fewer than 7% reach high school. The stigma that follows them is not incidental — it actively blocks access to employment, healthcare, and housing. The researchers make a point worth dwelling on: upgrading the community's legislative status, while necessary, is nowhere near sufficient. Real structural integration requires administrative reform, market access for artisanal products, and sustained grassroot engagement.

Rajpriya and Sudarkodi (2024) trace the historical arc using ethnographic fieldwork — the community's migration from northwest India to southern forests, and the livelihood collapse triggered by the forest act. The shift to beadwork, tattooing, and scavenging filled the gap, but only partially; income remains precarious, rarely covering daily needs let alone debt.

Priyangha and Alex (2025), working with 50 respondents in the Pallavaram Narikuravar Colony, find that 36% cannot read or write, and 74% have dropped out of school. Most are in the unorganised sector — 36% as street vendors, 28% as scavengers — and 34% earn between Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 1,999 a month. Perhaps most consequential for welfare access: 76% have no birth certificates and 36% lack voter IDs. Without documents, most government schemes are simply unreachable.

Mohanasundaram et al. (2025), drawing on a snowball sample of 240 adults across six Tamil Nadu districts, find that nearly a third have no formal education at all, over 40% face regular caste-based discrimination, and only 45% have permanent housing. Ration card coverage is near-universal, and most have voting rights — but awareness of ST-specific welfare entitlements sits at just 56%. Urban residence and education made a significant difference to welfare awareness; for those without either, the reclassification has barely registered in practical terms.

3. Methodology

A qualitative case study design was used, chosen for its capacity to capture the contextual depth that survey methods tend to miss. Four participants were selected through purposive sampling — with variation in age, gender, health status, and length of time homeless — with the help of social workers familiar with the community. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted in Tamil, and supplemented by field observations at pavement dwellings in Chennai.

4. Case Studies

Case 1:

Pandian (name changed) is fifty years old, originally from Villupuram. He lost both parents at six and was raised by a maternal uncle, who later abandoned him as he aged. Without family support and with no access to formal education — poverty had meant rag picking from early childhood — he arrived in Chennai at twenty and began sleeping on pavements and selling beads across the city. That was thirty years ago. He is still there, moving between pavements, Hume pipes, and spaces under bridges. The only document he carries is an Aadhaar card. He has hypertension, diabetes, and Hepatitis B, and the co-morbidity has started affecting his vision. With no health card, the eye operation he needs is out of reach; the government hospital nearby gives him tablets for his blood pressure and diabetes, which is something, but not enough. These days he cannot work at all. He begs at Marina Beach to survive.

Case 2

Meena (name changed) is thirty-five, from Vellore, and has been managing alone since her husband died of renal failure — the result of years of alcohol dependence. She has three children. Her eldest daughter dropped out in Class 5; the two sons are not in school. Making and selling beaded ornaments and decorative items is her livelihood, seasonal and uncertain. She travels across Chennai by local train with her children to sell, spending days moving from place to place. At night, they sleep near the Kanagi statue at Marina Beach, where a number of Narikuravar families camp temporarily. It is open sky. Strangers have threatened her; belongings have been stolen more than once. When she approached the NULM homeless shelter at Marina

Beach — a facility that exists precisely for people in her situation — she was turned away by other inmates who did not want a Narikuravar woman inside. Sanitary workers across the beach have repeatedly refused to let her use public toilets.

Case 3:

Ramesh (name changed) is twenty-eight, from a small village in Tiruvannamalai district. His family depended on seasonal trade — beaded ornaments, decorative items, tattooing — and moved constantly in search of work.

Stability was never really part of his childhood. The family's constant movement made regular schooling impossible, and though he was enrolled in a government school for a while, he dropped out in Class 7. Being called by caste names, being made to sit separately — the discrimination was consistent enough that school stopped feeling like a place worth attending.

He came to Chennai at nineteen with a few relatives, hoping the city would offer something more reliable. It did not. Without education, skills, or any social network to plug into, formal employment was not available. He picked up whatever he could — helping in small shops, construction sites, roadside stalls — but nothing lasted and nothing paid well.

He and his group settled onto pavements, under flyovers, open spaces near the beach. Living outside meant constant exposure — to theft, to eviction drives by authorities, and to a public that routinely assumed he was a thief or criminal simply because of who he was. That suspicion followed him everywhere.

The drinking started as something occasional. Hunger, stress, a sense that there was no way forward — alcohol offered a kind of relief, and it gradually became an addiction. His earnings went into it. His health declined. He avoided hospitals partly from fear of being turned away and partly because he had no documents to present.

He survives now through rag picking and occasional work during festival seasons. He says he wants a stable job. He wants to stop drinking. But without any education, skills, or institutional support, he cannot see how the cycle breaks.

Case 4

Lakshmi (name changed) is seventeen. She has grown up in temporary settlements near bus stands, market areas, and open grounds in Chennai, in a family that sells small toys and decorative items to get by.

She was a regular student until Class 8. She wanted to become a nurse — still does, apparently. But her mother began falling ill repeatedly and needing hospitalisation, and Lakshmi became the default caregiver for her younger siblings alongside managing household tasks and helping with selling. Her attendance became irregular. The syllabus moved on without her.

Living in open spaces, the most basic forms of privacy are unavailable. Changing clothes, maintaining hygiene — these are genuinely difficult. During her menstrual periods, the difficulty becomes acute: no clean toilets, no water, no sanitary products on most days. She manages with cloth, in conditions that are neither safe nor healthy.

Her parents restrict her movement — not as punishment, but out of fear. As she has grown older, the risk of harassment and exploitation has grown more visible to them. At the same time, she is expected to help with income. She lives inside that contradiction constantly.

Community members have started suggesting marriage proposals. The reasoning offered is that it is not safe for a girl in their situation to remain unmarried — which is, of course, a way of saying that the precariousness of their lives is her problem to solve. She does not want to get married yet. She has no documents in her own name, no link to any adolescent welfare scheme or scholarship, no awareness of what might be available to her because nobody has told her. An important period of her life is passing with no institutional presence at all.

She spends most days on household work, caring for siblings, occasionally selling alongside the family. The ambition to become a nurse has not disappeared — but it has become increasingly abstract, crowded out by the immediate demands of survival.

5. Thematic Analysis

Across the four cases, a set of recurring patterns emerges — structural, social, and personal — that collectively explain both how these individuals came to be homeless and why leaving homelessness remains so difficult.

Every participant had their education disrupted. The reasons varied — poverty, early work obligations, family responsibilities, constant movement, caste-based discrimination in schools — but the outcome was consistent. None finished schooling. For a community that is already excluded from formal labour markets, this matters enormously. Education is often described as the way out of poverty. For these four, that route was closed before they had any real chance to use it.

5.1. Pathways into Homelessness

The paths into homelessness looked different for each person. Pandian was abandoned at twenty with nowhere to go. Meena lost her husband, was left to raise three children alone, and came to Chennai because the city seemed like a better chance. Ramesh came looking for work and found none. What links these stories is not a single cause but an accumulation — family breakdown, migration, a complete absence of affordable housing — that made sleeping outside the only available option.

5.2. Precarious Livelihoods and Economic Vulnerability

All four survived through informal, seasonal work. Beads, rag picking, decorative items, tattooing during festivals. Pandian moved between rag picking and bead selling depending on the season. Meena travelled across the city by train with her children to find buyers. Ramesh took whatever casual labour he could find. None of it was stable, none of it paid reliably, and none of it offered any path toward the kind of income that might cover rent, healthcare, and a child's schooling simultaneously.

5.3. Lack of Identity Documents and Exclusion from Welfare Schemes

The documentation problem came up in every case. Pandian has an Aadhaar card and nothing else — no health card, which means the eye operation he needs is simply not available to him. Lakshmi has no documents in her own name and is therefore invisible to every adolescent welfare scheme that formally exists for people exactly like her. Meena's children are out of school, and there is no record of them in any education or welfare system. The schemes exist on paper. For these families, the paper is the barrier.

5.4. Health Challenges and Limited Access to Health Care

Health problems were near-universal and largely unmanaged. Pandian's situation — hypertension, diabetes, Hepatitis B, and now deteriorating vision — is an extreme case, but it is not anomalous. Ramesh's health had been declining for some time, worsened by alcohol and by the avoidance of hospitals he anticipated would either turn him away or demand documents he did not have. Meena's husband died of renal failure driven by chronic alcoholism. The thread connecting these stories is not just poverty; it is the combination of poor living conditions, inadequate nutrition, and a healthcare system that effectively requires documentation to access.

5.5. Social Exclusion and Discrimination

Discrimination was not incidental — it was structural and daily. Meena being turned away from the shelter and refused use of public toilets were not isolated events; they were expressions of a broader social positioning in which Narikuravar people are seen as less entitled than other homeless people to the same spaces and services. Ramesh was watched, suspected, assumed to be a criminal — repeatedly, by strangers, on the basis of identity alone. This kind of treatment does not just cause direct harm; it drives people away from the institutions that might help them. Several participants avoided hospitals, government offices, and welfare centres not from ignorance but from the expectation, well-founded in their experience, that they would be humiliated.

5.6. Substance Use and Coping Mechanisms

Alcohol was a recurring presence in the cases, though its role was more complex than simply a risk behaviour. For Ramesh, drinking began as a way to cope with hunger, hopelessness, and social isolation, and escalated into dependence. His earnings went into it; his ability to work diminished. Meena's husband followed a similar trajectory,

with fatal consequences. Chronic stress and a complete absence of legitimate outlets seem to make substance use both understandable and, over time, devastating.

5.7. Desire for Change and Structural Barriers

What the cases do not show is passivity. Ramesh wants to stop drinking and find stable work. Lakshmi wants to finish her education and become a nurse. These are not vague wishes — they are articulated, specific goals. The problem is not absence of aspiration; it is the near-total absence of the conditions that would make those aspirations reachable. Structural barriers — no education, no skills, no documentation, no social support — close off the routes that should, in theory, be open.

6. Discussion

What this study finds, taken together, is that homelessness among the Narikuravar is not a personal failure or a random misfortune. It is the outcome of historical marginalization — the colonial dismantling of their livelihood, decades of misclassification, and ongoing caste discrimination — layered onto structural exclusions that continue to operate in the present. The cases are individual stories, but the patterns within them are systematic.

The education disruption across all four cases is not coincidental. Poverty, nomadism, discrimination in schools, and domestic obligations — especially for girls — have combined to ensure that formal education remained largely inaccessible. Without it, the route into formal employment closes, which in turn forecloses stable housing, healthcare access, and the documentation that unlocks welfare. These things compound each other in ways that are hard to interrupt at any single point.

The pathways into homelessness here do not fit the standard narrative of rural-to-urban migration for jobs. The Narikuravar are not people who moved to cities in search of opportunity in the usual sense. Their homelessness is rooted in their historical semi-nomadic status, the collapse of their traditional livelihood under forest conservation laws, and the ongoing unavailability of land or formal housing for people like them. Meena came to Chennai because her husband was dead and she needed income. Ramesh came because his family could not survive elsewhere. These are not the same as choosing to migrate.

The informal livelihoods described in the cases — seasonal bead selling, rag picking, casual labour — are not meaningless. They sustain life, in the narrowest sense. But they offer no accumulation, no stability, and no path toward the kind of economic position that might allow someone to rent a room or enrol a child in school consistently. The formal economy remains effectively closed to people without credentials or recognised qualifications.

The documentation gap deserves particular emphasis. The 2023 reclassification of the Narikuravar as a Scheduled Tribe is significant — it took over sixty years — but the

cases in this study suggest it has not yet translated into real access to services. Legal recognition is necessary but not self-executing. Without birth certificates, ration cards, health cards, or voter IDs, welfare schemes remain unreachable regardless of what the category says on paper. And obtaining those documents requires a permanent address, paperwork, and social networks that homeless people simply do not have.

The health picture is concerning. Chronic, unmanaged conditions were present in most of the cases. Pandian's multi-morbidity is striking but probably not unusual given his living conditions — open exposure to the elements, irregular food, no preventive care, and a healthcare system that requires an ID card to access free treatment. Fear of discrimination and lack of documentation together are keeping people away from facilities that are, technically, available to them.

The social exclusion documented here has colonial roots. The designation of certain communities as 'criminal tribes' under British policy created a stigma that outlasted the laws themselves; the social perception of the Narikuravar as inherently suspicious or undeserving persists in daily interactions even now. Meena being refused shelter and toilet access by other homeless people — not by officials, by people in equally precarious situations — is perhaps the starkest illustration of how embedded this stigma is.

The gender dimension of homelessness in this community is not well-understood, and this study only begins to surface it. For women and adolescent girls, homelessness carries specific vulnerabilities — lack of privacy, restricted mobility, pressure for early marriage, exposure to harassment, and no access to menstrual hygiene. Lakshmi's case in particular points to the way adolescent girls can become structurally invisible: no documents in her name, no link to any adolescent welfare programme, no guidance about what might be available, and a set of domestic obligations that effectively replace school.

Several practical directions follow from this. Homeless shelters need to be genuinely inclusive — which means training staff and addressing the caste discrimination that currently operates within shelters themselves, not just at their doors. Documentation processes need to be brought to the community rather than requiring people without addresses to navigate bureaucratic systems designed for settled populations; mobile documentation camps and shelter-address provisions would help. Livelihood programmes should recognise and build on existing traditional skills rather than treating bead-making and craft work as irrelevant. Health outreach needs to reach people where they are, without documentation requirements as prerequisites. And women and adolescent girls need targeted attention — safe spaces, hygiene access, and protection from the early marriage pressure that currently represents the community's response to a safety problem that the state is not solving.

7. conclusion

This study is, to the best of our knowledge, among the first to examine homelessness specifically among the Narikuravar through qualitative case study methods. What it shows is that their homelessness is not primarily a housing problem — or not only that. It is a social phenomenon produced by historical marginalization, persistent caste discrimination, exclusion from documentation systems, and the absence of any meaningful institutional support. The cases are individually difficult; together, they form a pattern that calls for a structural response.

Addressing homelessness in this community requires more than building more shelters or expanding scheme coverage on paper. It requires a genuine shift in how the state and society relate to the Narikuravar — recognising their citizenship not as a bureaucratic formality but as an actual entitlement, ending the discriminatory practices that operate across service delivery, and creating real pathways toward economic and social inclusion. These people are not asking for extraordinary treatment. They are asking for the ordinary treatment that has been withheld from them for a very long time.

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A Qualitative Study on the Living Conditions of the Clay Idol-Makers of Cachar District, Assam

Srijita Ghosh[1]
Dr. G. Albin Joseph[2]

Abstract

Clay-idols are rooted in India's religious customs, beliefs and traditions. The artisans who are making the clay-idols are known as Mritshilpi. These artisans are making clay-idols from generations to generations by upholding the tradition of their families as well as their community. Their handcrafted clay idols are always the centre of attraction of Hindu religious festivals like Durga Puja, Kali puja, Ganesh chaturthi etc. While the Mritshilpis from Kumartuli, West Bengal are praised worldwide for their unique artistic skills and innovative clay idols, the artisans from other places are not considered or appreciated the same way. The inflation, lack of popularity and acknowledgement, interior locations became major hurdles for the clay idol artisans of Cachar District, Assam yet they are still continuing their work. They are dedicated to their work as it has been their only way to make a living. This paper focuses on the living conditions as well as the problems and struggles faced by the clay-idol makers of Cachar district, Assam. This paper employs a quantitative approach to provide an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter along with real-life experience of the artisans.

Keywords: *Clay Idols, Artisans, Mritshilpi, Living Conditions, Assam*

Introduction

The cultural heritage of India is often recognized by its unique traditional crafts from different states and union territories. Each craft depicts unique ideas, history, lifestyle of the people, customs and traditions of a region. Clay idols are associated with social customs as well as religious festivals and rituals. Every year, the Hindu community celebrates several religious festivals like Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Laxmi Puja, Saraswati Puja, Ganesh Chaturthi etc. The Main attraction of these festivals is the idols of gods and goddesses. But the artisans those who are making these clay idols with their artistry, hard work and patience, nobody recognizes them. While their idols are being worshipped, their well-being is often disregarded by the worshippers and even by the government.

Cachar district of Assam is one of the three districts of Barak Valley which is dominated by the Bengalis. According to 2011 census, Hindu community represents

[1]Srijita Ghosh, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Email Id – ghoshsrijita2000@gmail.com, Phone Number – 8617030819

[2]Dr. G. Albin Joseph, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Email Id –albinjosephg@gmail.com, Phone Number – 9435175167

50% of the total population of Barak Valley, where as in Cachar district, 59.83% of total population follows Hinduism. Silchar circle of this district shows highest percentage of the Hindus which is 72.19%. Several idol makers are residing in this area because of the demand of idols during the religious festivals. But they were not getting any recognition or appreciation for their work. They are facing constant financial challenges which contribute to decline their living condition.

Kolkata's Kumartuli is widely known for their talented idol-makers. Clay idols of Kumartuli, West Bengal received wide recognition in an international level. Kumartuli eventually became a significant hub of production of idols because of innovative artistic idol-making. Especially, during Durga Puja, the artisans are even getting orders for Durga idols from different parts of the World outside India. While they are receiving so much appreciation for their work, the artisans of Cachar district are living with disappointment and poverty. But no research work has been conducted on the clay-idol artisans of this region. Though a few research papers can be found on Kumartuli artisans but they were not relevant in social work context.

Therefore, this paper intends to explore the living condition of the clay-idol artisans of Cachar district of Assam. This paper employs the qualitative approach of research so that it can describe the socio-economic condition of those artisans as well as their problems in a comprehensive manner. Along with highlighting the significance of the artisans in preserving traditional customs, the study also aims to raise awareness of the necessity of their social and economic growth.

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to find out the socio-economic condition and the struggles of clay idol-makers living in Cachar district, Assam.

Methodology

Methodology discusses about the area of the study, research design, sources of data collection, the type of data analysis, ethical considerations and research limitations of the study. In this study, the researchers have adopted the qualitative method of research in order to meet the objectives of the study. The qualitative method of research makes a detailed analysis of the research study by observing human behavior, comprehending their intentions and attitudes. This form of research gives emphasis on the views of its participants. It is effective for those researches where the proportion of the sample is limited or small and it begins with a specific setting.

The researchers have chosen the exploratory research design for this particular study. The research design is framed with the goal of obtaining the comprehensive knowledge about the research topic and also to satisfy the objectives. It is an exploratory type of research hence no hypothesis is generated from this study.

In this present study, a multiple case study design has been implemented. 5 idol-makers above 18 years of age has been selected through snowball sampling from different villages of Cachar district, Assam which serves as the study area for this research.

Limitations of the study

The view limitations have been by the authors while conducting the study. These are mentioned below-

1. The research area is limited only in a few villages. The area of the study is specific, not broad.
2. The findings of the study cannot be generalized as the sample size is too small to generalize.
3. All the respondents were male as no female respondents could be found. That's why gender specific challenges couldn't be originated.

Ethical considerations

1. The principle of confidentiality has been followed and maintained throughout procedure. Before collecting the data, the consent has taken from each one of the participants and it has been informed to them that the data provided by them would remain confidential.
2. The information gathered from the participants was respected and used solely for research purposes.
3. No respondent has been forced to participate. Their participation was entirely voluntary.
4. The researchers did not manipulate or fabricate the respondents' shared experiences in any way. During the data collection, the researcher did not force them to comment on any question that they were not hesitant to answer.

Case Study Profile

- **Socio-demographic information of the participants:**

Case No.	Gender	Age	Educational Qualification	Religion	Average Monthly Income	Full time/ Seasonal
Case No. 1	Male	65	No formal education	Hindu	15000-16000	Full Time
Case No. 2	Male	67	No formal education	Hindu	6000-8000	Full Time
Case No. 3	Male	45	Secondary	Hindu	8000-9000	Full Time

Case No. 4	Male	60	Primary	Hindu	14000-15000	Full Time
Case No. 5	Male	62	Class 8	Hindu	20000-25000	Full Time

Case No. 1

Shyamal Pal (name changed), a 65-year-old idol-maker, is living in a village in Cacher district, Assam is involved in idol-making for more than 25 years. This elderly artisan is working to support his 9-membered-family. 6 members of the family are involved in the same profession and helping him actively. Alongside, the household runs a stationary shop. But that does generate significant earning. Their main occupation is idol-making from which they earn Rs. 12500 per month in average. The peak season is mainly September-October month when Bengali Hindus celebrate their biggest festival Durga puja. During the peak season, they earn around Rs. 50000 per month but that amount drops into Rs. 5000-15000 per month during the off season.

Mr. Pal shared that the price of the raw materials is increasing continuously. In idol-making, they use three different types of soil among which they have to buy two types of soil. Each of the both soils costs around Rs. 3000/- per 7-8 quintal soil. Also, they need to buy woods, bamboo sticks, colours to paint, decorations, straw and ropes etc. He bought a spray-paint machine which costed around Rs. 20,000/-.They sell a medium sized Durga idol at around Rs.10000-15000/- but the making cost of the idol is around Rs. 5000-8000/-. According to him, the profit is very less because they need to go through multiple procedures and steps to complete making one idol and it demands a lot of hard work. During peak season they need to work day and night to finish making the idols and send them to the customers in the given time. He mentioned that the rainy season hampers their work a lot because of the damp weather. He said that he never received any assistance from the government. Even, he had to draw loan from private bank. When he was asked about the reason behind continuing this occupation even after several problems, he said that he learnt this skill of idol-making from his father and it is their family tradition. He has no other skill with which he can start another occupation. Even his sons also want to pursue the same occupation as they also learnt this skill from their father and they want to keep their family legacy alive.

Case No. 2

The 67-year-old idol-maker from a rural area of Cachar District, Assam, Mr. Sunil Pal (name changed), is making idols of Hindu gods and goddesses for almost 40 years. He learned the skill at the age of 14 from an idol-maker who lived at Karimganj, Assam and he worked with him for 7 years. Later, he started working by his own. He now lives with his wife and a son in a kutcha house; he has two daughters who are already married. For him, idol- making is the only way to earn for his family because

he has no other occupation rather than that. According to him, he earns the most during September to November and February to April that is approximately Rs. 20000/- per month but the rest of the six months, he hardly earns Rs. 3000/- per month to even nothing at all.

He also mentioned that the price of the raw materials is increasing day by day. He needs to buy soils at the rate of Rs. 5000/- per 7-8 quintals and other materials like bamboo at Rs. 200/- per piece, iron at Rs. 100/- per kg, straws at Rs. 5000/- per van etc. During the peak season, he has to hire a labourer to work with him for 6 months and he has to pay him Rs. 10,000-15,000/- along with fooding and accommodation. He is also suffering from different health issues and his medicines cost around Rs. 4000/- per month. He shared that he has faced a huge loss in the month of February because he couldn't sell all the Saraswati idols that he made. The researchers have also seen almost 8-9 idols were there which weren't sold. He said that he got orders for making idols but the customers cancelled at the last moment and one customer didn't even inform. All his hard work and the time he invested on making the idols went in vain. The space in his workshed is so less that he couldn't make more numbers of Durga idols and that's why even during the peak season, his earning is lesser compared to other idol makers. He didn't receive any assistance from the government at any point of time for his work. Currently his son is working with his and he is willing to continue idol-making in future as it is the only skill with which he can generate earning.

Case No. 3

Mr. Rabi Pal (name changed), a 45-year-old idol-maker has rented a place in a rural market of Cachar as the workshop for idol-making. Though he lives in a different village nearby, he chose this place to start his business for better transportation and more exposure to the customers. According to him, people can notice his work easily while passing by and this location is easier to find for the raw material suppliers and even for the customers. But he has to pay the rent of Rs. 1200/- per month. Trained by his father, he got involved in idol-making almost 20 years ago. The sells are highest from September to November. At that time, he needs to hire workers. They charge around Rs. 4000-5000 per Durga idol for making the frame, shaping with the straw and layering clay on it. He earns around Rs. 20000-30000/- per month on the peak season but the rest of the year he hardly earns Rs. 3000-5000/- per month. He mentioned that the he can earn around 20-25% of profit and the most profit comes from selling Durga idols while the profit percentage is lesser for smaller or single idols like Saraswati, Manasa, Laxmi etc.

He has two sons and a daughter. The sons sometimes help him in this work and they are also learning this skill from him apart from studying. They show interest in following the footsteps of their father but also want to involve themselves in a stable occupation. According to Mr. Pal, the profit is very less in comparison of the hard work as well as the price of the raw materials has also been raised. Even there are

problems like storing some particular raw materials for the whole year as it is only available in a particular time but preserving them properly is also a challenge. He said, “It is very difficult to feed a family of 5 with this income but he has no alternative option to generate more earning”.

Case No. 4

Mr. Mahadeb Pal (name changed), clay idol artisan aged over 60, is making clay idols for more than 40 years. He lives at a village nearby to Silchar city. His skill transmitted from his father and grandfather through hands-on experience. According to him, September to November- these 3 months are considered as the peak season because of Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja and Kali Puja. A Durga idol takes 7 days to make it ready for selling. He hires contractual artisans to complete the framing and layering of clays during the peak season. For each Durga idol, he needs to pay Rs. 4000-5000 to that artisan. The cost price of a Durga idol is 8000-9000 and he sells it at Rs. 15000. He stated, “Durga idol is the most profitable among all the idols. The profit is lesser in the case of smaller idols like Laxmi, Saraswati, Manasa etc.” Puja committee members from Silchar, Udharbond and other places of Cachar buy idols from him. His average monthly income is Rs. 14000-15000.

He is a member of a family of five. His wife, two sons and a daughter also assist him in this work. He sells clay pots which are needed in Hindu religious practices beside clay idols and apart from that they are not interested to start any other business. But he wants his children to opt for other professions as they are pursuing higher education and he believes that even after extreme hard work, the profit is not justifiable. Generally, he works for 10-12 hours every day but during peak season, he has to work for 14-16 hours to complete the idols on time. He has studied till class IV that’s why he had no other option but to choose this family occupation. He collects the soils from Barak River, Chatla Hawar and local ponds while most of his other raw materials come from Silchar. Like other idol-makers, he also believes that the price of the raw materials is rising up day by day which compels them to increase the price of the idols but the customers bargain a lot and he has to sell it in the selling price of previous years. Thus, the profit percentage is decreasing making it difficult to bear the expenses of the household.

Case No. 5

Mr. Radhamadhob Pal (name changed), 62 years old, living in a village close to Assam University, Silchar, has 50 years of experience in idol-making. Apart from making clay idols, he also sculpts idols made of cement. Previously he used to run a photo studio for 20 years beside making idols. But 12 years ago, due to rapid digitalization, he lost customers as they no longer need printed photos. He currently lives with his wife and daughter. He has 3 more sons and 3 more daughters. He said, “I used to earn a lot by running the photo studio. With that earning, I arranged my

daughters' marriage." His sons stay at other places with their family and the daughters are also married. His eldest son is a driver; the middle one is a mason and the youngest one works with decorators. Even they are involved in other professions, his sons assist him during the peak season. His annual income is now around Rs. 2,50,000-3,00,000. September to November is the peak season for clay-idols. Per Durga idols, he earns Rs. 5000-10000 profit while the cost price is Rs. 20000-30000. He said that cement made idols are more profitable. He receives orders for the cement-made idols from different places and makes them at his workshop or even sometimes he goes to that particular place and sculpts the idol permanently at that place. He showed the researchers a cement made Manasa idol which took 3 months to complete but he sold it in Rs. 60000. The expenditure of making this idol was Rs. 20000.

He also mentioned that he stocked some of the raw materials in a particular time of a year like soils must be accumulated between March-April while the straw is stored for the rest of the year during November to January. He also talked about the increased price of raw materials is also increasing the expenditure of making an idol. Raw materials like twine rope costs Rs. 170/kg and bamboo costs Rs. 180-200 per piece but previously that were available in lesser price. He received assistance from the government. He participated in a training organized by DICC-Silchar (previously known as Zilla Shilpa Kendra) and received Rs. 250 for participation. He received a room for a rent of Rs. 3 per month for working by DICC. Now, the rent of that room is Rs. 120 per month. He was thankful to the government for this assistance. But he also admitted that the income is less compared to the hard work. As his age is also increasing, his body cannot endure excessive work load and because of health issues, he cannot work sometimes. But his daughter and wife help him as much as they can do. But he was really worried for his future when he will not able to work anymore.

Findings

- **Process of clay-idol making:** The process of making clay-idols involves manifold stages. Firstly, the artisans must collect all the necessary raw materials which are clay, wood, bamboo, straw, jute ropes, cloth, paints, decorative items like hair, ornaments, weapons, saree etc. Then, they have to build a structure made by tying bamboo sticks and wooden pieces and shape the body by tying the straws around the bamboo frame. Alongside, they also have to prepare the clay. Three types of soil are needed for idol-making. The soils go through the steps like cleaning, soaking, kneading and mixing, then filtering, keeping on rest and testing before it actually becomes ready for application. Once the structure is built and shaped with straw, the artisans apply the first layer of clay on the structure. After that, the clay must be dried properly to prevent the cracks. The same process needs to be repeated again. But this time the layer should be smoother and the artisan shapes the fingers, nails, and other body parts of the idols and adds fine detailing with their immense artistic skill. Once this layer is also dried, the

artisans sometimes put soaked cotton clothes on the clay layer to prevent cracks. Once the clay layers are dried and smoothened properly, it is ready to be painted. While colouring, first the idol is painted with white base colour and then the other colours are applied accordingly. Once the paint is completely dried, the artisan decorates the idol with ornaments, sarees, hair and weapons. And once everything has been assembled properly, it becomes ready for selling. All these processes take lots of hard work, effort and time.

- **Family Tradition:** Three out of five artisans learnt this skill of idol-making from their father or grandfather and idol-making was their family tradition. Rest of them had no family history of idol-making, they were the first generation to choose this occupation. Most of the cases, the whole household is involved in the same occupation. For majority of the cases, idol-making is the only source of earning.
- **Income:** The monthly income ranged between Rs. 6000- Rs. 25000. Their income depends on what type of idol they were making. Durga idol is considered as the most profitable idol. The artisan who makes idols with cement along with clay idols, earns the most.
- **Peak Season**: September to November is considered as the peak season and they earn the most during that period.
- **Problems faced by the artisans:** The most common type of problems faced by the idol-makers was the increased price of raw materials and all the artisans agreed with that. According to them, the price of the raw materials is increasing every year but their income remains the same that causes the financial instability. They had to take loans while buying the raw materials as most of these raw materials have to be stored for the whole year in a specific time and it was not possible to arrange that amount of money as they have no savings.All of them also mentioned about the workload and they believed that the income is lesser in compared to the hard work they put to make each idol. Some of the artisans mentioned that there are some months when they did not get even a single order of an idol. So, it was very evident that their income was not fixed or stable and they end up with zero saving. 4 out of 5 respondents never received any assistance from the government for their work, though one of them have received assistance from government. The only reason for them to pursue this occupation is that they have lack of skills to start any other business or pursue any other occupation. Though the offspring of these artisans are helping them in idol-making, majority of the artisans do not want their next generation to continue this occupation as they want them to pursue higher studies and attempt for better income opportunities.

Conclusion

After conducting the case studies, the findings undoubtedly showed the vulnerability and consistent challenges faced by the clay-idol artisans. It has also been evident that the artisans are not even aware about government initiatives that can be beneficial for

them to expand their business and live a better life. 4 out of 5 respondents have never received any govt. benefits regarding their work. Problems like price-hike of the raw materials, not able to sell the idols, less income have potential to disturb their living condition which has been already affected by these issues. Awareness of government schemes, better production and marketing strategies, innovative ideas and following the trends can bring significant positive changes into this situation. But the artisans alone cannot improve their condition, the government also plays an important role in this. If the government along with the social workers and other volunteers actively participate and intervene in this matter, there is a hope to bring some constructive outcome for the betterment of their living conditions. Thus, the authors conclude with a suggestion that the government should devote more attention towards resolving the problems of artisans for securing a better future for them.

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Healthcare Access and Reproductive Health Issues Among Tribal Women in Churachandpur, Manipur

Khawlnunsangi[1]
Prof. H. Elizabeth[2]

Abstract

Health is one of the fundamental basic humans right which includes the reproductive health rights as well. Reproductive health status or a desired reproductive health status of women represents and determined the better health status of their health and the upcoming generation that contributes to the well- being of the communities. Reproductive health is one of a major challenge and a crucial component of the health of women, especially among tribal women particularly during the reproductive years. The socio- economic conditions, lack of awareness, level of education, lack of transportation, connectivity of roads, infrastructure and availability of health centres also plays a crucial role to seek proper accessibility. Therefore, the present paper aims to describe and provide an insight the reproductive health issues, challenges and health careseeking behaviour among tribal women in Churachandpur district, Manipur, India. The research design was descriptive and cross-sectional; the data were collected among 160 respondents through a pre-tested structured interview schedule. The study highlighted that majority of the women faced reproductive health problems, low treatment seeking due to various constraints such as distance, the unavailability of public health care. There is also higher treatment at the private medical instead of government health centre.

Keywords: *Reproductive health, Tribal Women, Reproductive Health Knowledge, Rural Manipur, Health-Seeking Behaviour*

Introduction

Reproductive health is one of the major priorities of global health and is a fundamental and alienable part of women's health due to child-bearing. Global priorities in women's health have undergone notable changes over the past 20 years. Hassan, A., & Golub, S. (2024) Earlier, the emphasis was largely on maternal and child health, with women's well-being often regarded as a means to improve children's health rather than being valued as a significant objective on its own. The international perspective on Reproductive health considered the factors that influence the reproductive health matters such as social status, economic position and access to resources. Maiti, S et.al. (2005) shows Clearly brings out the differential in healthcare

[1] Khawlnunsangi, Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl. Mobile No. 8731955065. Email: sangi.duhlian@gmail.com

[2] Prof. H.Elizabeth, Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl. Mobile No. 8132842926. Email-lizahatzaw@gmail.com

and health conditions among tribal and non-tribal women where its findings revealed that in each and every socio-economic, demographic as well as health parameter, the tribal women are much poor than the other non-tribal women. Singh, S. K., & Singh, A. K. (2006) study analysis pertaining to Reproductive Child Health (RCH) and health highlights that the major challenges and burden are related to their socio-economic vulnerability mostly in the age group of 15-44yeaars. Poverty and lack of awareness among the rural women can also cause delays in seeking appropriate health services until a condition reaches its most critical stages, Sangam, 2015. The Government of India initiated a Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) Programme in 1997, which aimed is to meet the reproductive health needs of women. It took initiative and ensure to present the reproductive health of women through the National Family Health Survey. The latest National Family Health Survey (2019-21) NFHS -5 report showed with regards to access to maternity care mothers who had an antenatal checkup in the first trimester are 75.5 % (urban) and 67.9% in rural with a total of 70. 0% against 58.6% in NFHS – 4 (2015-16). In delivery care institutional birth in public has been access by 52.6% (urban) and 65.3% (rural) with a total of 61.9% which is against 52.1% in NFHS-4 (2015-16). In Antenatal care 92% received antenatal care from a skilled provider or health professionals 91% from a doctor and 1 % from an auxiliary nurse midwife ANM. Meanwhile, The NFHS-5 (2019-21) Manipur report also showed that when it comes to delivery care 80% of delivery/births take place in a health facility (mostly government facility) and 20% take place at home. It also showed that institutional births are common among women with 12 or more years of schooling, women who are having the first birth and urban women.

The status of women in the tribal societies seems to be comparatively better than that of women in general society because tribal societies have been by and large characterized as egalitarian societies especially in relation to the hierarchical character of caste society Roselima, K. P. (2014). Although the status of tribal woman is higher as compared to their non-tribal counterparts elsewhere in India, men in their own society do not treat them as equals (Nembiakkin, 2008). Poor maternal health is still prevalent in many communities (Patel, Das, & Das, 2018). A study by Bhanderi, M. N., & Kannan, S. (2010) revealed that 57 percent of women had at least one reproductive morbidity and only one third of them treated for the same. Women belonging to SC/ST, residing 2 kilometres (Kms) away from facilities, longer duration of illness for more than one year accessed fewer health facilities than their counterparts. Patel, Das, & Das, (2018) found a significant proportion of respondents treated their reproductive health problems at private health facilities rather than government health Centre due to their perceptions of poor quality, lack of privacy, non- availability of RTI/STIs services non-availability of female medical officers, heavy rush and long waiting time at the government health facility. Very often, access to private clinic has also been common though people from economically lower sections is also because of the kind of services provided towards immediate accessibility in certain urgent cases as well. On the contrary to this as most of the respondents were living under low economic status, they may not continue the

treatment at private hospitals for the complete cure of reproductive health problems as it involves very high cost.

Reproductive health indicates the level of self-determination, women's reproductive rights, and the strength of tribal socio- political power. The awareness, knowledge and seeking behaviour of women regarding reproductive health problems certainly help in the prevention and control of those problems.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in two villages of which Salemveng and Ngurte villages in Churachandpur District, Manipur among 160 women belong to the reproductive age of (15-49) years. It is descriptive in design and cross-sectional in nature. Quantitative data were collected through the survey method by administering a structured, pre-tested interview schedule. The data was processed and analysed with the help of Census and Survey Processing System (CSpro) and Statistical Package for the Social sciences (SPSS).

Objectives

The present paper attempts to understand and identify the accessibility of reproductive care, issues and challenges and their health care seeking behaviour towards reproductive health among the tribal women in the study area.

Results and Discussions

The demographic characteristics of the respondents set the background the study. This section highlights the demographic background of the respondents that includes age group, age at the time of marriage, marital status and educational qualification. All these aspects are discussed in detail as presented in the Table 1 Socio- demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Sl. No	Characteristics	Frequency N=160	Percent
1	**Age**		
	15 to 18	3	1.9
	19 to 25	36	22.5
	26 to 31	34	21.3
	32 to 37	33	20.06
	38 to 43	41	25. 6
	44 to 49	13	8.1

2	**Age at Marriage**		
	15 to 18	39	24.4
	19 to 25	94	58.8
	26 to 31	20	12.5
	32 to 37	7	4.4
3	**Marital Status**		
	Married	140	87.5
	Widow	10	6.3
	Divorced	7	4.4
	Unmarried	1	0.6
	Single Mother	2	1.3
4	**Educational Status**		
	Illiterate	15	3.1
	Primary (Lower & Upper)	79	49.4
	High School	50	31.3
	Higher Secondary	20	12.5
	Graduate & above	6	3.8

Source: Computed

The data shows on the age of the respondent showing that the maximum of one fourth (25.6%) of the total respondents are belonging to the age group of 38 to 43 years. There is an equal distribution of 21.3% who belong to the age group of 19 to 25 years and 26-31 years respectively. Another 20.6% of the respondents are belonging to the age group of 32 to 37 years of age. Also, another 8.1% and 1.9% of the respondents belonging to the age group of 44-49 years and 15 to 18 years respectively.

The age of respondents at the time of marriage shows that more than half (58.8%) of the respondents got married between the age of 19 to 25 years and nearly one fourth (24.4%) got married between the age of 15 to 18 years. This is followed 12.5% who had married between the ages of 26 to 31years. Thus, a minimum of 4.4% got married between the ages of 32-37 years. The data shows that early marriage that is before the completion of 18 years was also present with a little less than one fourth (24.4%) among the respondents. In addition, less than 5% of late marriage which is unusual in tribal society was also observed among the respondents.

The marital status of the respondents is explored. The table shows that more than three third (87.5%) of the respondents are married. However, less than ten percent of the respondents (6.3%) were widows and 4.4% were divorcees. Further a minimal of 1.3% and 0.6% are single mother and also unmarried.

The educational status of the respondents shows that nearly half (49.4%) of the respondents had education up till standard VI followed by nearly one third (31.3%) of the respondents had attained till high school education. Another 12.5% of the respondents had completed till higher secondary education and while only 3.8% of the respondents are graduated. However, there are 3.1% of the respondents who were

illiterates. The table on the educational status of the respondents shows a decreasing pattern in enrolment and completion of higher education. Further, there is less than a total of 10 % of the respondents who had continued their education up till higher secondary and degree level courses.

Reproductive Health Challenges and Health Care Seeking

The respondents experience of reproductive ill health problems, to whom do they share their experiences, place of treatment, how often they took care of reproductive health problems and how was it diagnosed were explored on the table.

Table 2 represents on the respondents' experienced on several reproductive ill health problems among which nearly half the respondents (48.1%) had experience vaginal white discharge accompanied by itching/fever/bad odour/irritation around vaginal area. Nearly one fourth (23.1%) of the respondents had experienced severe abdominal pain that is not necessarily related to menstruation. It is important to note that another 16.9% of the respondents had experienced pain or burning while urinating or frequent difficult urination, for less than tenth (2.5%) they had experienced others related reproductive health complaints such as continuous back pain and frequent heat sensation on feet and feeling thirsty

Surprisingly, 3.1% and 0.6% of the respondents had shared their reproductive ill health problems to visionary and also with the priests or their local pastors. Thus, the enquiry is not applicable to 10% of the respondents as they do experience reproductive ill health problems.

Table 2 Reproductive Health Challenges and Health Care Seeking

Sl. No	Characteristics	Frequency N=160	Percent
1	**Experienced Reproductive Health Problems**		
	Vaginal discharge accompanied by itching/fever/bad odour/irritation around vaginal area	77	48.1
	Severe lower abdominal pain not related to menstruation	37	23.1
	Pain or burning while urinating or frequent difficult urination	27	16.9
	Others	4	2.5
	NA	15	9.4
2	**Mode of diagnosis**		
	Through medical investigations	109	68.1
	Interpreted by elder women	23	14.3
	Others	3	1.9
	Faith healer	2	1.3
	NA	23	14.4

3	**Report Reproductive Health problems to**		
	Husband	87	54.4
	Relatives	27	16.9
	Mother-in-laws	11	6.9
	Friends	7	4.4
	Doctors	6	3.8
	Pastor/Priest	1	0.6
	Visionary	5	3.1
	NA	16	10
4	**Place of Treatment**		
	Private medical sector	77	48.1
	Public medical sector	45	28.1
	Did not seek any treatment	29	18.1
	Traditional Healer	1	0.6
	NA	8	5
5	**Frequency of Health Care Seeking**		
	Always	47	29.4
	Sometimes	60	37.5
	Rarely	11	6.9
	Never	1	0.6
	NA	41	25.6

Source: Computed

In regards to the diagnosis of the reproductive health problems that more than two third (68.1%) of the total respondents were diagnosed through medical investigations. The data also shows that 15% of the respondents came across understanding the reproductive health problems through the interpretation of the elder women. This is not applicable to 14.4% of the respondents as they cannot mention any exact place of their diagnosis. While another 1.9% of the respondents came to understand the reproductive ill health problems through their friends and relatives who had already experienced it. It is self-reported that 1.3% of the respondents had diagnosed their reproductive health problems through the faith healer. While encountering such reproductive health problems the data shows that more than half (54.4%) of the respondents shared it with their husbands, followed by 16.9% of the respondents who had shared it with their relatives and 6.9% of the respondents used to share it to their mother in-laws and 4.4% of the respondents share among their friends. In fact, only 3.8% of the respondents had disclosed the matters to physician or doctors.

It is relevant to know the treatment seeking behaviour of the respondents. The data shows that nearly half (48.1%) of the respondents seek private medical care and more than one fourth (28.1%) seek treatment from the public government medical care. However, 18.1% of the respondents do not seek at all any treatment. Further, the remaining 5% does not report any particular place of treatment and had sought the

treatment depending upon the availability. It is worthwhile to mention that 0.6%of the respondents have gone to traditional healers for the reproductive health complaints.

In respect to the frequency of health care seeking by the respondents is rated using 4-point scale -always, sometime, rarely and never. The data shows that more than one third (37.5%) of the respondents only sometimes seeks for treatment and less than one third (29.4%) of the respondents does not always seek treatment when the face reproductive health problems. On the other hand, this particular enquiry is not applicable as the respondents does not experience reproductive health problems, some of the respondents cannot recall whether they seek for treatment or not. Thus, 6.9% of the respondents rarely seek for treatment, and 0.6% of the respondents never went for treatment.

The study found that the tribal women experience on several reproductive ill health problems among which nearly half (48.1%) had experience vaginal white discharge. With regards to their health seeking behaviour apart from consulting the health professionals it was found that (3.1%) and (0.6%) of the respondent had shared their reproductive ill health problems to visionary, local priest and also with local priest. In terms of their reproductive illness diagnosis, it shows that (68.1%) had found through medical investigation and (54.4%) shared their problems with their husband.

Looking at their illness treatment seeking practices it was found that almost half (48.1%) seek private medical care, on the other hand (18.1 %) do not seek medical treatment at all. More than one third (37.5%) only seek for treatment sometimes and less than one third (29.4%) does not seek medical treatment.

Findings

The maximum of the total respondents belongs to the age group of 38 to 43 years. And half of the respondents get married between the age group of 19 to 25years and most of the respondents were married and engaged in homemaking or housewife where they did not have any individual income to fulfil their personal needs or contributed on the family income. Nearly half of the respondents had completed their education only upto the level of class vi standards.

With the seeking of treatment on reproductive ill health problems, it is found that nearly half of the respondents seek private medical care and more than one third of the respondents only sometimes seek for treatment. Some of the respondents did not even seek any treatment and more than two third of the respondents were diagnosed through medical investigations.

Conclusion

In conclusion towards reproductive health challenges among tribal woman of Ngurte and Salemveng villages, most of the women had experiences reproductive health

problems during their reproductive age years. Among the married women their spouse plays a very important role towards women and reproductive health as they were the first to be informed while facing those challenges. The level of education of women also plays a significant role towards the reproductive health knowledge, their treatment-seeking behaviour and frequency of taking the treatment, these findings has also been supported with that of Bhasin et al. (2020), Gupta and Raj (2024), and Singh et al. (2026) where their studies also highlighted that education had a significant influence towards women's reproductive health treatment- seeking behaviour, higher the level of education of women higher the likelihood to recognised reproductive health problems and utilise health care services. It also emphasized that education enhances awareness, informed decision-making and their timely access to appropriate treatment.

The study would also like to highlight that though there has been reproductive health challenges and constraints encountered by the respondents were accessibility to public health care services. Majority of the respondents has no health care centre available in their own villages and the distance to the nearest health centre was more than five (5Kms) kilometers. The level of seeking treatment to medical treatment has been low and most of them opted for private clinic which also shows that the lack of public health care services availability with regards to reproductive health and overall health services in general, in order to promote the well-being of women overall health and reproductive health we must ensure the availability of accessing the services towards reproductive health care needs, and reproductive health awareness should be promoted at the local and grassroots level to focus especially to women who are of lower level of education, and who had several limited constraints.

The study anticipated poor reproductive health care services utilization especially in the public services among the tribal women in rural settings and has demonstrated that societal, individual, socio- demographic and public health services factors affect towards the reproductive health care seeking behaviour among tribal women. To ensure the fundamental rights of tribal women and to address on the challenges which they had experienced and to uphold their dignity towards their reproductive healthcare ensuring availability and accessibility should be provided. It will also play a significant role and an important indicator of leaving no one behind especially tribal women of Churachandpur district in pursuit of our country achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (3) & (5) on good health and wellbeing and to ensure achieving gender equality.

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Challenges to Sustainable Livelihood of the Street Vendors in Guwahati City of Assam

Dr. Bijoy Das [1]
Srinivas Rao [2]
Manimugdha Medhi [3]

Abstract

Street vendors play a crucial role in urban economy by offering affordable services while contributing to local employment and cultural diversity. There are numbers of issues and challenges that hinder their sustainability and hinder their economic and social well-being. Among all, regulatory hurdles, legal ambiguity, conflicts and frequent eviction, inadequate infrastructure, hygienic store for their goods, financial issues and challenges all continue to be major hindrances to their development and sustainability. In addition, societal stigma, issues of self-esteemed difficulties have always been a concern for their social integration. Growing market demands and shifting customer preferences also make it harder for them to expand and retain their way of life. Thus, to explore the sustainability of urban street vendors, the researcher intended to conduct this study in Guwahati City, Assam with 50 respondents from the regular three markets of the city. The study further recommends the strategies and measures to promote the standard of their livelihood and possible scopes for sustainable livelihood.

Keywords*: Street Vendors, Livelihood, Sustainable, Challenges*

Introduction:

Street vending is a prevalent informal economic that contributing to urban livelihoods in many developing countries, including India. In Guwahati City, located in the north-eastern state of Assam, street vendors are providing various goods to the residents and tourists and earning their livelihood. However, ensuring the sustainable livelihood of these vendors presents a complex challenge due to various socioeconomic factors and urban dynamics. This article explores various challenges of street vendors in Guwahati and discusses potential opportunities for creating a more sustainable and supportive environment for their livelihoods. Street vendors are always been a very vital part of any informal economy. They may be designated as invisible entrepreneurs of the informal or unorganized sector. McGee and Young (1977) stated that street vendors offers services for sale in public places that contributes an

[1] Dr. Bijoy Das, Lecturer, DRU, District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Govt. Of Assam, Hailakandi, das.bijoy96@gmail.com

[2] Srinivas Rao, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, NEF Law College, Guwahati, Email: srinivasrao.sri15@gmail.com

[3] Manimugdha Medhi, Assistant Professor, Programme of Social Work, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences, Assam down town University, Guwahati. Email: manimugdha.medhi@adtu.in

important role in shaping informal sector of economy. The common problems of street vendors are; a) They have limited access to formal/regulated market spaces; limited scope of receiving any formal training etc., b) There is no official registration and records of the street vendors including census and other official statistics, c) They are not entitled to any social policy, security, social legislations. They have limited access to the protection of the rights of labourers and other benefits and d) They are compelled to work in poor work conditions and undefined working hours, etc.

Review of Literature

The study has gone through certain review of literacy which revealed the status of streetvendors in India and in other countries. Such as studies like; **Chakraborty and Koley (2018)** found that Married women street vendors live unhappy because of economic poverty; therefore, these women engage in street vending as occupation for the livelihood. Another study by **Dhamodharan (2019)** stated that mostly women are engaged in vending where they are encountered with problems such as sexual harassment, physical evictions by the enforcement authorities. They often migrate to the towns and cities due to poverty and absence of livelihood sources which also gives rise to many problems. In addition, **Dey (2021**) in his study, "Economics of Women Street Vendors –A study in Kokrajhar town of Assam" concluded that street vending brought remarkable changes in economic, social and psychological lives of women as a sign of women's empowerment. Further, **Jaishankar and Sujatha (2016)**in their study stated that street venders contribute significant role in local economic stability of the urban economies but they go through a number of issues to sustain because of fluctuation in marketprices and sale, low income, insecure and irregular employment. Another reason for decrease in income of streetvendors are forced to pay 15 to 20 percent of their daily income as bribes to local police and most of them survive without government support. **Maheshwari (2017)** stated that Illiterate and poor women undertake street vending to minimize the problem of Unemployment among the poor and maximise an opportunity of income generation. Many women take up street vending because of inadequate fund for small business and low confidence to start similar business. In addition to this another study by **Rahman and Junayed (2017)** found that street vendors frequently require financial help for sustenance. They avoid traditional banking system because of poor awareness and their social assets prove to be key as they are mostly helped by their friends and neighbors. **Peimani and Kamalipour (2022)** found in their study that shrinking job market and street vending are connected and there is a considerable relation between educational level and profitability because educated vendors prefer to get trained from time to time in order to tap the dietary needs of customers to keep themselves more profitable.

Objectives of the study:

- To study the Socio-economic conditions of the Street vendors under the Guwahati City of Assam
- To know the various day to day challenges by face by the street vendor of the Guwahati city
- To explore the sustainability of those type of livelihood among those street vendors

Research Questions:

- What are the present socio-economic conditions of the street vendors under the study area?
- What type of challenges they face in their day to day life?
- What are future scopes of those vending activities in their life?
- How they are planning to sustain those activities to live a standard life?

Significance of the Study:

Street vending being an integral part of economic development of a nation; it become a source of earning for a large section of poor people in the urban area of Guwahati. The study further focused onto the challenges faced by the street vendors and identified strategies to enhance their income-generating activities. It helps to promote social inclusion by providing opportunities for these vendors to thrive in their businesses. In addition, the study provides scopes in urban planning and Management issues such as location allocation, infrastructure development, and regulatory frameworks to ensure the safety and social security of them.

Methodology:

The study applied a descriptive research design with purposive sampling techniques to select the research participants from the Beltola Market area of Guwahati city of Assam. A semi-structured interview schedule has been used to gather data. collected data have been analysed through the use of frequency distributions, tabular form and graphical representation.

Findings and Analysis:

A. Socio-economic Conditions of the Street Vendors:

This represents basically the financial and social stability of on individual or a family in its society. Therefore, the first part of the findings the study deals with the socio-economic conditions of the street vendors. The findings are;

Table 1: Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents

Age of the Respondents		
Particulars	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
18-25	11	18.33%
26-35	25	41.67%
35 and Above	24	40.00%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Sex of the Respondents		
Male	22	33.67%
Female	38	63.33%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Social Category of the Respondents		
Generals	13	21.67%
SCs	10	16.67%
STs	24	40.00%
OBCs	13	21.67%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Monthly Income of the Respondents		
Below 5000	15	25.00%
5001-10000	20	33.33
10001-15000	17	28.33%
15000 and above	8	13.33%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**

(Source: Field Survey)

The above table shows that a good number of respondents fall within the age of 26-35, constituting the highest percentage (41.67%). The age groups 18-25 and 35 and above has relatively similar representation, with 18.33% and 40.00%, respectively. Further, it shows that females constitute a higher percentage of respondents compared to males, with 63.33% of the total respondents being female. Males make up 36.67% of the respondents. The data also revealed that maximum vendors are represents from ST category with 40.0% coming from different location of the state and outside and majority of them are earning bellow Rs. 10000/ with 28.33% of representation.

Table 2: Factors Pushed for Current Occupation

Factors	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Illiteracy	32	53.33%
Poverty	14	23.33%
Lack of big capital	02	3.34%
Lack of professional skill	12	20.00%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**

(Source: Field Survey)

The above table reveals that the majority of respondents chose street vending reasons are poverty, absence of sufficient capital because it is conducive to their poor economic conditions and does not require a significant capital to invest, while the remaining respondents chose street vending due to illiteracy and no professional skills.

B. Daily Challenges face by the street vendor:

Street vendors are the one of the most internal operating segment of human society and are facing witnessed to several problems in their regular business.

Table 3: Challenges in the Family

Challenges in Managing Household Work		
Particulars	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	42	70.00%
No	18	30.00%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Giving sufficient time to your family		
Yes	22	33.67%
No	38	63.33%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**

(Source: Field Survey)

The present study depicts that, 70% of respondents said they faced challenges in managing household work due to their family size and lack of support from other family members. In comparison, 30% said that managing household work did not face difficulties because other family members shared the responsibilities of household chores and that the size of their families was supportive. It reveals that 63.33% of respondents are unable to devote enough time to their families, while only 33.67% believe they do. When it comes to time consumption, a lot relies on the type of items because some require less time to sell than others, such as street food, snacks, candies, etc., while others, such as toys, clothing, household gadgets, etc., take a considerably longer time to sell.

Table 4: Nature of the Shop / Place of Vending

Nature and Place of Vending		
Particulars	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Same Location	56	93.33%
Not Fixed	04	06.67%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Paying Taxes or rent for the Place		
0-1000	50	83.33%

1000-1500	08	13.33%
1500-Above	02	3.34%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**

(Source: Field Survey)

The aforementioned table depicts that the majority of respondents, i.e. 93.33%, claim that their shop is situated in the same location as the daily market. They have been given a space to rent for the daily market, or have set up their booths in a location that has been approved by the local authorities or government. However, 6.67% of respondents claimed that because of the type of goods, their businesses are not always located in one location. Further, the study reveals that, 83.33% of respondents spend up to Rs. 1000 in rent for their daily needs, 13.33% pay Rs. 1000–1,500, and 3.34% pay Rs. 1500 or more. The variance in rent that must be paid depends on the location of the public meeting spot and on facilities related to it, such as security, vending machine demand, etc.

Table 5: Challenges in Purchasing & Selling Goods

Challenges in Selling Goods		
Particulars	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Not getting expected return	34	56.67%
Limited time to sale the perishable items	20	33.33%
Customer satisfaction	06	10.00%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Challenges in Purchasing Goods		
Lack of capital	16	26.67%
Perishable items	02	3.34%
Difficulty in getting credit	24	40.00%
Others	18	30.00%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**

(Source: Field Survey)

In contrast, 33.33% of respondents say that having a less time to sell perishable items is a serious challenge because perishable items have a very short shelf life, which causes price and demand of such products to quickly go low and sometimes they go unsold. Most of the respondents with 56.67%, are of the opinion that the difficulty they face is return is not as per their expectation because the profit margin is quite low and because of fluctuation in sales. While 10% of respondents said it was challenging to please customers. Further, the above table also stated that the majority of respondents, i.e. 40%, struggle with receiving things on credit when making purchases, whilst for 30% of the respondents, issues may include paying a price that is also higher who make bulk purchases, handling products carefully when they

arrive, etc. 26.67% of businesses struggle with a lack of money. Besides this, using others space, or public spaces e.g. pavements, near sports grounds, weekly bazar, near temples etc (Bhowmick, 2010) are always been a problem for them.

C. Scope of Sustainability of Livelihood:

To make economically stable, a sustainable source of livelihood is important (Kumari.) that can help to maintain a minimum standard of living among the economically marginalized groups. Especially, for the people with poor socio-economic conditions including the street vendors. Factors like; illiteracy, poverty, no permanent settlement, migration are some of contributing factors that involve them in such livelihood. The present study focussed onto the scope of sustainability of the street vendors.

Table 6: Motive and Scope of Sustainability of the Work

Scope of Sustainability of the Work		
Particulars	**No. of Respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	18	30.00%
No	42	70.00%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Motive behind their Work		
To support the other earning members	08	13.33%
To improve living condition	18	30.00%
To fill up free time	00	00.00%
Poverty	34	56.67%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**
Alternative Livelihood		
Yes	20	33.33%
No	40	66.67%
Total	**60**	**100.00%**

(Source: Field Survey)

The aforementioned table shows that 70% of them mentioned that it will not support for long into their future. This is because seasonality of the source of their income, a lack of profit margin, family being larger than average, and the absence of any other earners. In contrast, 30% believe that their current means of support will last into the future because of financial support of other family members, additional sources of income, and the small size of their family. It is further revealed that 56.67%, who work as street vendors come from low-income families and have less education andno other occupational skills. 30% of these respondents work as street vendors to improve their living conditions beyond basic sustenance and to elevate their social status, while the remaining respondents also support other in the family too.Meanwhile, the

majority of respondents i.e. 66.67%, reported having no other source of income, due to a variety of potential factors, including poverty, the presence of minors in the family, ongoing education, or a lack of education sufficient to secure a job.

Conclusion:

The sustainable livelihood of different street vendors in Guwahati City requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the challenges they face while leveraging opportunities for growth and improvement. By formalizing their status, providing infrastructure support, enhancing their skills, and ensuring access to financial services, local authorities and stakeholders can contribute to a more inclusive and vibrant urban economy. Additionally, by recognizing the cultural and economic significance of street vending, Guwahati can preserve its unique identity while fostering a more equitable and sustainable urban landscape. NGOs and various welfare organization may come forward to take various health and awareness programmes for those vendors. Activists and policy makers need to take initiatives to formulate and implement laws related to the social security of the vendors across different cities.

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Barriers Faced by Youth in Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in Tseminyu Town, Nagaland

Ajunlo Kent[1]
Dr. Abel Ariina[2]
Bokatoli Kinimi Z[3]

Abstract

This study is all about the barriers limiting youth to participate in skill development programmes and entrepreneurship in Tseminyu Town, Nagaland. Despite several government initiatives promoting self-reliance and employment, many young people remain disconnected from such opportunities. The research adopted a quantitative approach to collected data from youth who are in the age group from 15 to 29. A structured questionnaire is frame to understand their awareness, attitudes, and participation levels. The findings reveal that socio-economic constraints does not strongly perceived as major barriers by most respondents. However, limited local opportunities, preference for government jobs, fear of failure, and self-doubt influenced youth participation. The study further identified lack of awareness about available programmes, inadequate guidance, and absence of mentorship as the most significant barriers. Cultural expectations and social influences also shaped career choices and discouraged entrepreneurial engagement. The study highlights the need for better awareness campaigns, stronger mentorship systems, and practical youth-oriented training programmes to enhance youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship in the region.

Keywords: *Youth Empowerment, Entrepreneurship, Skill Development, Entrepreneurial Challenges, Employment Opportunities*

Introduction

Youth form one of the most dynamic and productive segments of society and their active participation in economic and social development are crucial for any region's progress. In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis on skill development and entrepreneurship as key pathways to address unemployment and promote self-reliance among young people. In India, initiatives such as Skill India and Startup India have been introduced to equip youth with relevant skills and encourage them to explore entrepreneurial opportunities. These efforts are particularly important in

[1]Ajunlo Kent, Researcher, North East Institute of Social Sciences and Research (NEISSR), Nagaland. Mobile No. 9383309791. Email: ajunlokent5@gmail.com

[2]Dr. Abel Ariina, Assistant professor NEISSR, Nagaland. Mobile No. 8974894531. Email: abel_ariina@ymail.com

[3]Bokatoli Kinimi Z, Assistant professor NEISSR, Nagaland. Mobile No. 6009110700. Email: akatykini@gmail.com

regions like Nagaland, where limited industrial growth and dependence on government employment continue to shape career aspirations.

Despite the availability of such programmes, a large number of youth remain disengaged from skill development and entrepreneurial activities. Many continue to prefer stable salaried jobs, especially in the public sector, while opportunities in private and self-employment sectors remain underutilized. This gap between available opportunities and actual participation raises important questions about the challenges faced by young people in accessing and engaging with these initiatives.

The issue is not simply about lack of opportunities, but about the presence of multiple barriers that influence youth decisions. These barriers may be socio-economic, such as limited access to resources; cultural, such as family expectations and social norms; psychological, including fear of failure and lack of confidence; and informational, particularly gaps in awareness and guidance. Understanding how these factors interact is essential for designing effective interventions that can genuinely support youth empowerment.

In recent years, skill development and entrepreneurship have been widely promoted as practical solutions to youth unemployment and economic stagnation. While several government and non-government initiatives have been introduced to support young people, their actual participation, especially in regions like Nagaland, remains relatively low. This gap between available opportunities and youth engagement highlights the need to closely examine the underlying reasons that prevent young people from benefiting from such programmes.

Nagaland faces a unique situation where educated unemployment is high, and there is a strong preference for government jobs over private or entrepreneurial careers. At the same time, opportunities in skill development and self-employment often go underutilized. This indicates that the issue is not only about the availability of programmes but also about the presence of deeper barriers that influence youth choices and participation.

There is a need to understand these barriers in a systematic way, particularly at the local level. Factors such as lack of awareness, limited access to information, fear of failure, social expectations, and absence of proper guidance may play a significant role in shaping youth decisions. Without clearly identifying and measuring these challenges, it becomes difficult to design effective policies and interventions that truly address the needs of young people.

This study is therefore important as it focuses on identifying and analyzing the various socio-economic, cultural, psychological, and awareness-related barriers faced by youth in Tseminyu, Nagaland. By providing evidence-based insights, the study aims to support policymakers, educators, and development organizations in creating more accessible, relevant, and youth-friendly programmes that can enhance participation and promote sustainable livelihoods.

Review of Literature

Youth is widely recognized as an important part of society because of its role in economic, social, and political development. The United Nations defines youth as individuals aged 15–24 years, while the National Youth Policy of India (2014) considers youth as those aged 15–29 years. Youth is also seen as a stage of transition from dependence to independence, often marked by identity formation and increasing responsibilities. This stage makes young people vulnerable to unemployment, social pressure, and career uncertainty, while also making them an important force for innovation and economic growth.

Youth participation has become an important topic in policy and academic discussions. Judith Bessant (2010) explains that youth participation is promoted to empower young people and involve them in decision-making. However, the author also notes that some policies focus more on control than real empowerment. Even so, many scholars agree that meaningful participation helps reduce exclusion and encourages youth involvement in social and economic development. Active participation also helps young people build confidence, responsibility, and leadership skills.

A large number of studies identify barriers that limit youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship. Ruiz (2024) explains that problems such as transportation, financial difficulties, work responsibilities, and social isolation reduce youth participation, especially in rural and disadvantaged communities. The study shows that youth exclusion is influenced by social, economic, and institutional factors.

Kew (2016) states that entrepreneurship helps reduce unemployment by creating jobs, promoting innovation, and encouraging self-reliance. Similarly, Peter (2004) explains that entrepreneurship helps youth turn ideas into business opportunities through planning and management skills. These studies show that entrepreneurship supports both individual and economic development.

Despite its benefits, youth entrepreneurship faces many barriers. Kew (2016) identifies fear of failure as a major challenge for young entrepreneurs. Llisterri et al. (2006) also explain that many youth enter business because of economic need rather than innovation or interest. These studies show that entrepreneurship is influenced by economic conditions and social support.

The role of education and skill development is also important. Ismail (2018) states that entrepreneurship education and vocational training improve confidence, creativity, and problem-solving skills among youth. Shobana and Kumar (2025) further explain that entrepreneurship programmes encourage youth to consider self-employment as a career option.

Researchers also highlight the importance of mentorship and institutional support. Bose and Mukherjee (2020) found that mentorship programmes improve entrepreneurial confidence among youth. Government initiatives such as Pradhan

Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana and Start-up India support entrepreneurship through training and financial assistance, though poor implementation remains a challenge in rural areas.

In Northeast India and Nagaland, entrepreneurship faces social and geographical challenges. Keyho (2018) found that poor infrastructure, limited financial access, and lack of practical exposure discourage youth participation. Khongsai (2025) explains that Nagaland's cultural heritage creates opportunities in tourism and handicrafts, but these require proper support and skill development.

Social expectations also influence youth career choices in Nagaland. Aier (2019) found that many families prefer government jobs because they are viewed as stable and secure. However, studies by The Morung Express (2021) show that entrepreneurship training and fellowships can positively change youth attitudes toward self-employment.

Studies also highlight the importance of sustainable entrepreneurship. Many youth today prefer businesses that support social and environmental well-being. Sustainable enterprises are therefore seen as important for community development and long-term growth (P. Jason, 2025).

Overall, the literature shows that youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship is influenced by social, economic, cultural, and psychological factors. Although entrepreneurship and skill training are important for reducing unemployment, barriers such as lack of awareness, fear of failure, and weak support systems continue to affect youth participation.

Research Methodology

Rationale of the Study

This study is important because it helps to understand the challenges that stop youth in Tseminyu Town from joining skill development programmes and entrepreneurship activities. Many studies have discussed youth unemployment and lack of skills at the national level, but very few studies have focused on the local problems faced by youth in Tseminyu. These problems include social, economic, cultural, psychological, and awareness-related barriers. The study aims to identify these major challenges and understand how they affect youth participation. The findings can help policymakers, educators, and NGOs develop better programmes, increase awareness, and provide stronger guidance and support for young people. The study can also help promote employment, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance among youth in the region.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the factors influencing youth disinterest in skill development programs in Tseminyu, Nagaland.
2. To observe the challenges that prevents young people in Tseminyu from pursuing entrepreneurship.
3. To identify and quantify the socio-economic and cultural barriers that hinder youth engagement in entrepreneurship activities.
4. To what extend do awareness gaps and lack of access to information hinder youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship?

Research Methodology

This study is a descriptive research design with quantitative research study method to understand the barriers that affect youth participation in skill development programmes and entrepreneurship in Tseminyu Town, Nagaland. The study tries to descript the different social, economic, cultural, psychological, and awareness-related problems faced by youth. The study focuses on young people between the ages of 15 and 29, including school students, college students, unemployed youth, young professionals, and aspiring entrepreneurs living in Tseminyu Town. Around 100 to male and female respondents are selected for the study. The quantitative method helps the researcher collect numerical data and understand the common barriers affecting youth participation.

The study uses simple random sampling to select respondents from educational institutions, youth clubs, and community organizations in Tseminyu Town. This method gives equal opportunity for eligible youth to participate in the study. Primary data is collected through structured questionnaires to gather information about awareness, attitudes, participation levels, and challenges related to skill development and entrepreneurship. Secondary data is collected from books, journals, government reports, research articles, and online sources related to youth employment and entrepreneurship. The collected information is analyzed using simple statistical methods to identify the major barriers faced by youth and to better understand their participation in skill development and entrepreneurial activities.

Data Analysis

Barriers to youth participation skill development and entrepreneurship			
Statement	**Response**	**N=100**	
		Frequency	**Percentage**
Lack of Access to Loans or Capital	Strongly disagree	11	11%
	Disagree	5	5%

	Neutral	28	28%
	Agree	19	19%
	Strongly Agree	37	37%
Unaffordable Training cost	Strongly disagree	16	16%
	Disagree	4	4%
	Neutral	11	11%
	Agree	33	33%
	Strongly Agree	36	36%
Limited Local Business Opportunities	Strongly disagree	3	3%
	Disagree	2	2%
	Neutral	7	7%
	Agree	37	37%
	Strongly Agree	51	51%
Govt. Job Preferences	Strongly disagree	3	3%
	Disagree	2	2%
	Neutral	6	6%
	Agree	24	24%
	Strongly Agree	65	65%
Gender Norms Affecting Business Participation	Strongly disagree	27	27%
	Disagree	26	26%
	Neutral	28	28%
	Agree	9	9%
	Strongly Agree	10	10%
Fear of Business Failure	Strongly disagree	6	6%
	Disagree	12	12%
	Neutral	8	8%
	Agree	26	26%
	Strongly Agree	48	48%
Doubt in Business Management Ability	Strongly disagree	9	9%
	Disagree	21	21%
	Neutral	32	32%
	Agree	26	26%
	Strongly Agree	12	12%
	Strongly disagree	8	8%

Lack of Awareness of Skill Development Programs	Disagree	10	10%
	Neutral	20	20%
	Agree	30	30%
	Strongly Agree	32	32%
Lack of Awareness of Government Schemes	Strongly disagree	9	9%
	Disagree	14	14%
	Neutral	25	25%
	Agree	31	31%
	Strongly Agree	21	21%
Lack of Counseling or Mentorship for Business	Strongly disagree	7	7%
	Disagree	8	8%
	Neutral	10	10%
	Agree	35	35%
	Strongly Agree	40	40%
Business Risk Stigma	Strongly disagree	5	5%
	Disagree	6	66%
	Neutral	34	34%
	Agree	19	19%
	Strongly Agree	36	36%
Job Security Pressure	Strongly disagree	1	1%
	Disagree	8	8%
	Neutral	34	44%
	Agree	24	24%
	Strongly Agree	33	33%
Skill Deficiency	Strongly disagree	13	13%
	Disagree	14	14%
	Neutral	12	12%
	Agree	22	22%
	Strongly Agree	39	39%

The study identified several economic, social, psychological, and informational barriers that affect youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship. The findings indicate that multiple factors work together to discourage young people from pursuing entrepreneurial activities and self-employment opportunities.

Regarding access to loans or capital, 37% of respondents strongly agreed and 19% agreed that lack of financial support is a major barrier to entrepreneurship.

Meanwhile, 28% remained neutral, while 11% strongly disagreed and 5% disagreed. These findings suggest that more than half of the respondents view financial constraints as a significant challenge when starting a business. Limited access to credit, investment, and startup capital may prevent many youth from transforming their business ideas into reality.

For unaffordable training costs, 36% strongly agreed and 33% agreed that the cost of training programmes limits their participation. At the same time, 11% were neutral, while 16% strongly disagreed and 4% disagreed. This indicates that training expenses are a major concern for many young people. High costs may discourage youth from enrolling in programmes that could improve their skills and increase their employability or entrepreneurial potential.

The issue of limited local business opportunities received one of the strongest responses. A majority of respondents, 51%, strongly agreed and 37% agreed that there are insufficient business opportunities in their locality. Only 7% remained neutral, while 3% strongly disagreed and 2% disagreed. This finding suggests that the local economic environment does not provide enough opportunities for youth to engage in entrepreneurial activities, making it difficult for them to establish or sustain businesses.

The findings also reveal a strong preference for government employment. About 65% of respondents strongly agreed and 24% agreed that government jobs are preferred over entrepreneurship. Only 6% were neutral, while 3% strongly disagreed and 2% disagreed. This overwhelming preference reflects the perception that government jobs offer greater job security, stable income, and social prestige compared to business ventures. Such attitudes may reduce interest in entrepreneurship among young people.

Concerning gender norms affecting business participation, only 10% strongly agreed and 9% agreed that gender-related expectations limit participation in entrepreneurship. In contrast, 27% strongly disagreed and 26% disagreed, while 28% remained neutral. These findings indicate that gender norms are not widely perceived as a major barrier by most respondents, although a small proportion still experiences gender-related challenges.

Fear of business failure emerged as an important psychological barrier. Nearly half of the respondents (48%) strongly agreed and 26% agreed that fear of failure discourages them from engaging in entrepreneurship. Only 8% were neutral, while 6% strongly disagreed and 12% disagreed. This suggests that concerns about financial loss, uncertainty, and possible business failure significantly influence youth decision-making.

Regarding doubts about business management ability, 12% strongly agreed and 26% agreed that they lack confidence in their ability to manage a business. About 32% remained neutral, while 9% strongly disagreed and 21% disagreed. The large neutral response suggests uncertainty among many youth regarding their entrepreneurial

capabilities. This highlights the need for entrepreneurship education and practical business training.

Lack of awareness of skill development programmes was also identified as a significant issue. About 32% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that they are unaware of available skill development opportunities. Meanwhile, 20% were neutral, while 8% strongly disagreed and 10% disagreed. These findings suggest that information about training programmes is not reaching a considerable section of the youth population.

Similarly, lack of awareness of government schemes remains a concern. About 21% strongly agreed and 31% agreed that they are not aware of government support schemes related to entrepreneurship and skill development. Around 25% were neutral, while 9% strongly disagreed and 14% disagreed. This indicates that many young people may not be benefiting from existing government initiatives due to limited awareness.

The absence of counselling and mentorship was identified as one of the most significant barriers. About 40% strongly agreed and 35% agreed that they lack access to counselling and mentorship for business development. Only 10% were neutral, while 7% strongly disagreed and 8% disagreed. These findings highlight the importance of mentorship in guiding young entrepreneurs, building confidence, and helping them overcome business challenges.

With regard to business risk stigma, 36% strongly agreed and 19% agreed that fear of negative social judgment discourages entrepreneurship. About 34% remained neutral, while 5% strongly disagreed and 6% disagreed. This suggests that social perceptions about business failure may discourage some youth from taking entrepreneurial risks.

Job security pressure also influences career choices among youth. About 33% strongly agreed and 24% agreed that concerns about job security affect their decision-making. While 34% remained neutral, only 1% strongly disagreed and 8% disagreed. These findings indicate that many young people prefer stable employment options because they provide financial security and reduce uncertainty.

Finally, skill deficiency was reported as a major challenge. About 39% strongly agreed and 22% agreed that lack of skills hinders their participation in entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, 12% were neutral, while 13% strongly disagreed and 14% disagreed. This finding suggests that many youth feel inadequately prepared to start or manage a business. Strengthening skill development programmes and entrepreneurship training can therefore play a crucial role in promoting youth entrepreneurship.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that youth participation in entrepreneurship is influenced by a combination of financial barriers, limited business opportunities, preference for secure government employment, fear of failure, lack of awareness, inadequate mentorship, and skill gaps. Addressing these challenges through affordable training, improved access to finance, awareness campaigns, mentorship

programmes, and entrepreneurship education can significantly enhance youth engagement in skill development and entrepreneurial activities.

Recommendations

Improve access to financial support and credit facilities: Since 56% of respondents (37% strongly agree and 19% agree) identified lack of access to loans or capital as a major barrier, government agencies, financial institutions, and development organizations should provide youth-friendly loan schemes with low interest rates and simplified application procedures. Financial literacy programmes should also be conducted to help youth understand savings, investment, and business financing options.

Provide affordable and accessible skill development programmes: As 69% of respondents reported that training costs are unaffordable, there is a need to offer subsidized or free skill development programmes. Training centres should be established closer to communities and scholarships or financial assistance should be provided to economically disadvantaged youth to encourage participation.

Create more local entrepreneurship and employment opportunities: Since 88% of respondents perceived limited local business opportunities, government departments, local bodies, and private organizations should promote local enterprises, value-added businesses, and rural industries. Special focus should be given to sectors such as agriculture, food processing, handicrafts, tourism, and digital services, which have the potential to generate employment within the community.

Strengthen Career Guidance, Mentorship, and Entrepreneurship Support Systems: With 75% of respondents indicating a lack of counselling and mentorship, educational institutions, youth organizations, and government agencies should establish mentorship programmes where experienced entrepreneurs can guide aspiring youth. Regular career counselling, business incubation support, and entrepreneurship workshops can help young people gain confidence and practical knowledge.

Enhance Awareness of Skill Development Programmes and Government Schemes: The findings show that many respondents lack awareness of available skill development programmes and government support schemes. Therefore, awareness campaigns should be conducted through schools, colleges, social media, community meetings, and youth clubs. Information should be presented in simple and accessible formats to ensure that youth are informed about available opportunities and resources.

Promote Entrepreneurial Mindsets and Reduce Fear of Failure: Since fear of business failure, job security concerns, and preference for government jobs were strongly reported, efforts should be made to promote entrepreneurship as a viable career option. Success stories of local entrepreneurs should be highlighted, entrepreneurship education should be integrated into school and college curricula, and youth should be encouraged to view business challenges as learning opportunities

rather than failures. This can help build confidence, reduce risk aversion, and foster a more positive attitude toward entrepreneurship. These recommendations can help create a supportive environment for youth, enabling them to develop skills, explore entrepreneurial opportunities, and contribute to local economic development.

Conclusion

The study concludes that youth participation in skill development and entrepreneurship is affected by several barriers such as lack of mentorship, low awareness of programmes and schemes, fear of business failure, and lack of confidence in business management. The findings show that guidance, practical training, and proper information are important for encouraging youth participation in entrepreneurship activities. Although financial problems and gender norms were not seen as major barriers by most respondents, limited local opportunities and lack of support continue to influence youth decisions. Therefore, government agencies, educational institutions, NGOs, and community organizations should work together to provide better awareness, mentorship, and skill-based training for youth. Future studies can further examine the long-term impact of skill development programmes, the role of family and society, and the effectiveness of government initiatives in promoting youth entrepreneurship in different regions.

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Self-Help Groups as Catalysts of Women's Empowerment: Evidence from Lotovi Village, Nagaland

Bilu Lohe[1]
Dr. Abel Ariina[2]

Abstract

Women's empowerment has become an important component of sustainable rural development, particularly in societies where women continue to face socio-economic dependency, social exclusion and limited access to decision-making opportunities. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as effective grassroots institutions for promoting financial inclusion, livelihood generation and social participation among rural women. The present study examines the role of SHGs in empowering women in Lotovi Village under Niuland District, Nagaland. The study specifically focuses on the socio-economic impact of SHGs, women's participation in household and community decision-making, and the challenges faced in SHG participation. A mixed-method descriptive research design was adopted for the study. Primary data was collected from 40 SHG members through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Secondary data were collected from government reports, NABARD reports, journals, books, SHGs registers and related literature. The findings reveal that SHGs significantly improved women's savings habits, access to credit, income generation, confidence, and social participation. However, respondents continue to face challenges such as lack of market access, low literacy levels, irregular meetings, and limited institutional support. The study highlights the importance of financial literacy, skill development programmes, market linkage, and institutional support in strengthening SHGs and promoting women's empowerment in rural communities.

Keywords: *Self-Help Groups, Women Empowerment, Rural Development, Sustainable Livelihood, Nagaland, Community Participation.*

Introduction

Women's empowerment has emerged as an important concern in rural development, particularly in societies where women continue to face economic dependency, social exclusion, and limited participation in decision-making. Empowerment refers to the process through which women gain access to resources, confidence, opportunities, and the ability to influence decisions affecting their lives. In India, women's empowerment is closely linked with poverty reduction, livelihood security, and sustainable development.

[1]Bilu Lohe, Researcher, North East Institute of Social Sciences and Research (NEISSR), Nagaland. Mobile No. 7085441753 Email: bilulohe@gmail.com

[2]Dr. Abel Ariina, Assistant professor NEISSR, Nagaland. Mobile No. 8974894531. Email: abel_ariina@ymail.com

Among various rural development approaches, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as successful grassroots institutions for promoting women's empowerment and financial inclusion. SHGs are small voluntary groups where women come together for collective savings, internal lending, and mutual support. The modern SHG movement gained recognition through the Grameen Bank model introduced by Muhammad Yunus in Bangladesh. In India, the movement expanded through NGOs and the SHG–Bank Linkage Programme introduced by National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development in 1992. SHGs not only improve women's income and savings habits but also enhance confidence, leadership, communication skills, and participation in household and community affairs.

In Nagaland, women play an important role in both family and community life. Most rural women are involved in agriculture, weaving, livestock rearing, household work, and small business activities. Even though women contribute greatly to the family income and village economy, many still face problems such as poverty, poor market access, low literacy, unemployment, and lack of institutional support. In villages like Lotovi under Niuland District, women often have limited opportunities to improve their economic condition and participate in decision-making. Because of these challenges, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become an important way to support and empower rural women.

SHGs are small groups where women come together to save money, provide loans to members, and support one another socially and economically. In Nagaland, SHGs have increased through programmes like the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) and the Nagaland State Rural Livelihood Mission (NSRLM). These programmes encourage women to become financially independent and improve their livelihoods through small businesses and income-generating activities.

In many parts of Nagaland, SHGs have helped women start activities such as piggery, poultry farming, weaving, tailoring, vegetable cultivation, and petty trade. Through SHGs, women are able to save money regularly and access small loans for family needs or business purposes. Many women who were once financially dependent on others are now contributing to household income and taking part in family decisions. SHGs also help women gain confidence, leadership skills, and awareness about government schemes and development programmes.

Apart from economic benefits, SHGs also promote unity and cooperation among women. Regular meetings allow women to discuss common problems and support one another. In rural communities, SHGs have helped improve social participation and encouraged women to become more active in community development activities.

However, SHGs in Nagaland also face several challenges. Many groups struggle because of poor market linkage, lack of proper training, transportation problems, and limited institutional support. Some women also find it difficult to balance household responsibilities with SHG activities. In remote villages, poor roads and communication make it hard for women to sell their products in bigger markets. Lack

of knowledge about business management and financial planning also affects the growth of SHGs.

In Lotovi Village, SHGs have become an important platform for women's empowerment. Women members participate in savings, internal lending, and small livelihood activities that support their families. Although challenges still exist, SHGs continue to help women become more confident, self-reliant, and economically active. Therefore, this study aims to understand the role of SHGs in empowering women in Lotovi Village under Niuland District, Nagaland.

Review of Literature

Kabeer (2001) explained empowerment as the process through which women gain the ability to make strategic life choices. The study identified resources, agency, and achievements as important dimensions of empowerment and emphasized women's participation in economic and household decision-making.

Malhotra, Schuler, and Boender (2002) stated that women's empowerment is multidimensional, including economic, social, political, psychological, and educational aspects. The study highlighted that collective organizations help improve women's leadership, mobility, confidence, and social participation.

Puhazhendhi and Satyasai (2001) found that SHGs improved savings habits, access to credit, repayment capacity, and financial management among rural women. The study also observed that SHGs reduced dependency on moneylenders and encouraged livelihood activities.

Sanyal (2009) observed that SHGs help build social capital, confidence, leadership, and communication skills among women. Participation in SHGs also increased awareness regarding health, education, sanitation, and social rights.

Desai and Joshi (2013) found that SHGs contributed to livelihood improvement and women's economic independence through activities such as weaving, tailoring, farming, and petty businesses. Women's financial contribution also improved their social status within families.

Muhammad Yunus (2003), through the Grameen Bank model, demonstrated that collateral-free microcredit could improve women's self-employment, income generation, and social empowerment.

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (2019) reported that SHGs promoted financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, leadership development, and women's participation in rural development.

Zhimomi (2020) observed that SHGs in Nagaland supported livelihood activities such as weaving, piggery, poultry farming, and agriculture. However, challenges like poor market access, low literacy, and lack of institutional support continued to affect SHGs.

Kumar (2014) found that SHGs increased women's confidence, leadership qualities, and participation in household and community decision-making.

The reviewed literature shows that SHGs play an important role in women's economic empowerment, financial inclusion, livelihood improvement, and social participation. However, localized studies in tribal rural areas of Nagaland remain limited. Therefore, the present study examines the role of SHGs in empowering women in Lotovi Village.

Research Methodology

Rationale of the study

Women's empowerment is essential for achieving social and economic development, especially in rural areas where women often face issues like financial dependence and limited decision-making power.

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as effective mechanisms for promoting financial inclusion, social support, and collective empowerment among women.

In Lotovi Village, under Niuland District, SHGs play a significant role in supporting women's livelihoods and social development. However, the extent to which SHGs act as a catalyst for women's empowerment remains to be systematically underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the impact of SHGs on women's empowerment and identify the challenges faced in sustaining these efforts**.**

Study Area

The present study was conducted in Lotovi Village, located in Niuland District of Nagaland. Niuland is one of the newer districts of Nagaland, created in December 2021, and is predominantly rural in nature. The district shares boundaries with Chümoukedima and Dimapur districts, and its population is largely rural, depending on agriculture, small-scale trade, and allied activities for livelihood.

Lotovi Village is situated within this district and reflects the socio-economic realities of rural Nagaland. The village is inhabited by a close-knit community where agriculture is the primary occupation, supplemented by activities such as livestock rearing and small businesses.

In recent years, Lotovi has also seen the establishment of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) under government schemes and NGO initiatives aimed at promoting women's development. These groups focus on collective savings, income generation, and financial literacy, providing women with opportunities to contribute to household and community well-being

The study adopted a mixed-method descriptive research design to examine the role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in women's empowerment in Lotovi Village under Niuland

District, Nagaland. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to understand the socio-economic impact of SHGs, women's participation in decision-making, and the challenges faced by SHG members. The study was conducted among 40 women members belonging to different SHGs in the village using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Lotovi Village, a rural tribal community where agriculture, livestock rearing, weaving, petty trade, and daily wage labour are the main sources of livelihood, was selected as the study area because women actively participate in economic activities but continue to face challenges related to financial dependency, market access, and limited institutional support. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and one Focus Group Discussion (FGD), while secondary data were gathered from government reports, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development and NRLM reports, books, journals, SHG records, and related literature. Quantitative data were analysed using percentage analysis and presented through tables and charts, while qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis. Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were maintained throughout the study.

Objectives of the Study

• To assess the socio-economic impact of SHGs on women in Lotovi Village.

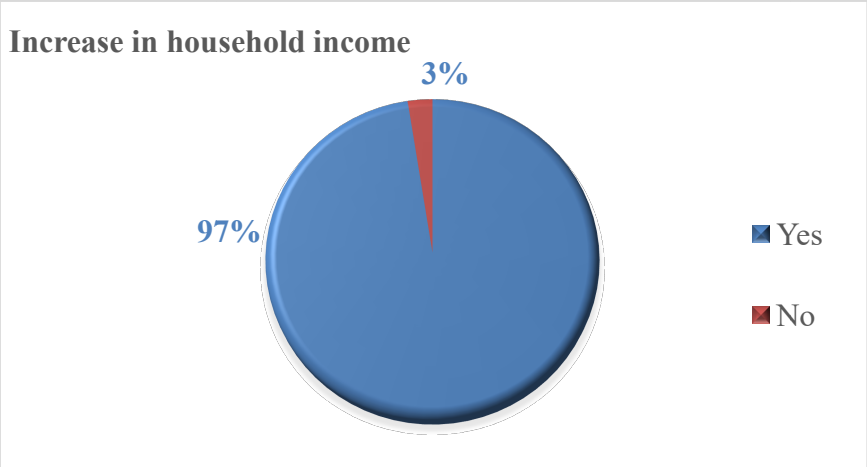
• To analyze the role of SHGs in enhancing women's decision-making power and leadership.

• To study the challenges faced by women in SHG participation.

Findings and Interpretation

Figure 1: Increase in Household Income after Joining SHGs

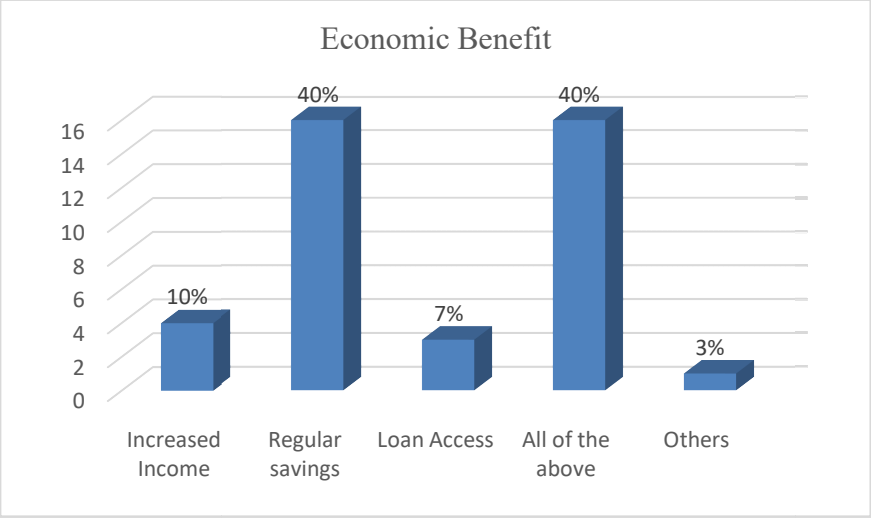
The study revealed that a large majority of the respondents (97%) experienced an increase in their household income after joining Self-Help Groups (SHGs), while only



3% stated that there was no significant improvement in their income level. This finding clearly shows that SHGs have played an important role in improving the livelihood conditions and economic stability of women and their families. Through participation in SHGs, women were able to access small loans, savings opportunities, and various income-generating activities such as small businesses, farming, weaving, or other local enterprises. These opportunities helped them earn additional income and reduce financial difficulties within the household.

The increase in income also enhanced the confidence and decision-making ability of women, as they became active contributors to family expenses such as children's education, food, healthcare, and daily needs. The findings suggest that SHGs not only support economic empowerment but also promote self-reliance and social development among women in the community.

Figure 2: Biggest economic benefit you gained from SHG membership



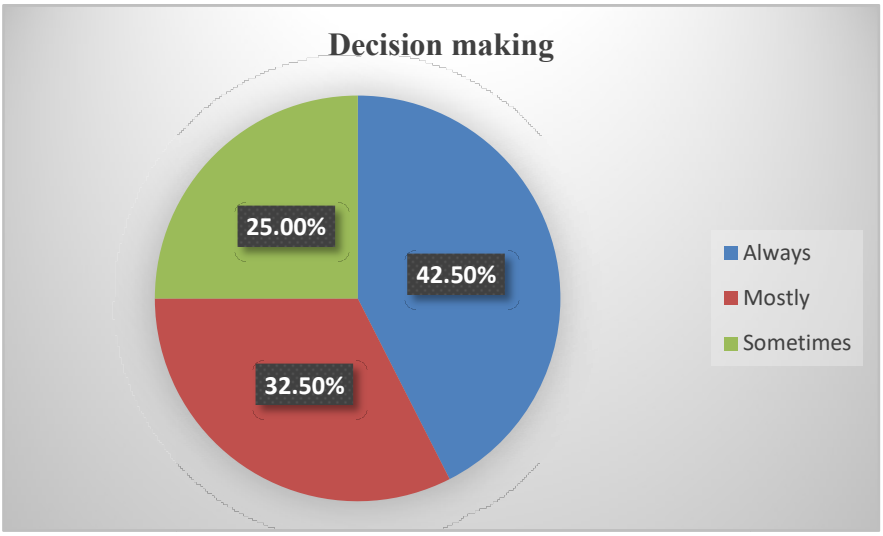
The figure indicates that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have provided several economic benefits to women members. About 40% of the respondents reported that regular savings was the most important benefit they received after joining SHGs. This shows that SHGs encouraged women to develop the habit of saving money regularly, which helped them manage household expenses and face financial emergencies with greater confidence.

Another 40% of the respondents stated that they experienced multiple benefits together, such as increased income, improved savings, and easier access to loans. This suggests that SHGs not only support women financially but also strengthen their overall economic condition by providing different opportunities for livelihood improvement. Around 10% of the respondents identified increased income as the major benefit, showing that SHGs helped some women earn additional money

through small businesses and other income-generating activities. Meanwhile, 7% highlighted access to loans as the main advantage, as SHGs provided easier financial support without depending on money lenders. Only 3% mentioned other benefits.

Overall, the findings clearly show that SHGs play an important role in improving financial stability, promoting savings habits, and enhancing the economic well-being of women members.

Figure 3: Participation in Household Decision-Making



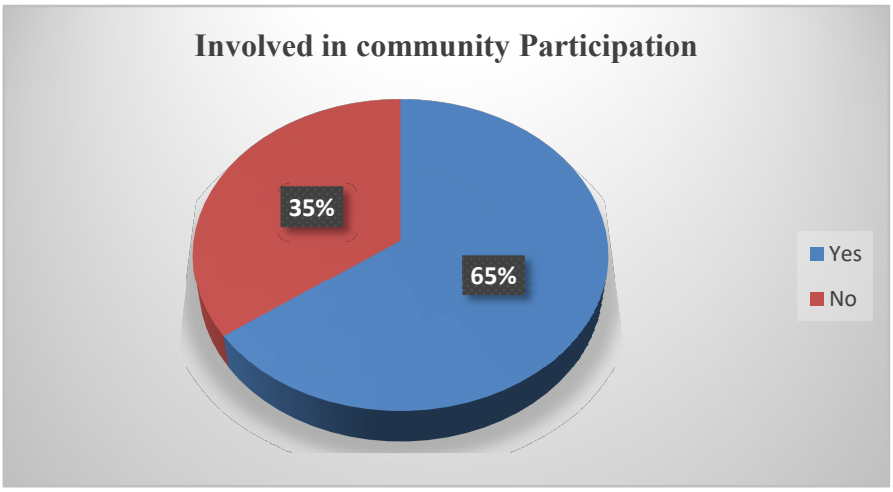
The findings show that participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) has positively influenced women's involvement in household decision-making. A large number of respondents reported that after joining SHGs, they became more actively involved in important family matters such as children's education, healthcare, household expenses, and savings. About 42% of the respondents stated that they "always" participate in household decisions, while 33% reported that they "mostly" participate. Another 25% mentioned that they "sometimes" take part in decision-making within the family.

These findings suggest that SHGs have helped women gain greater confidence, awareness, and financial independence, which in turn improved their role and influence within the household. As women started contributing economically to the family, their opinions and suggestions were given more importance in family discussions and decisions. This reflects an improvement in women's agency and bargaining power within the household.

However, the study also found that in some families, major decisions continued to remain male-dominated due to traditional gender norms and cultural practices. Despite this challenge, the overall findings indicate that SHGs have contributed

positively towards women's empowerment and participation in family decision-making.

Figure 4: Participation in community meetings through SHG

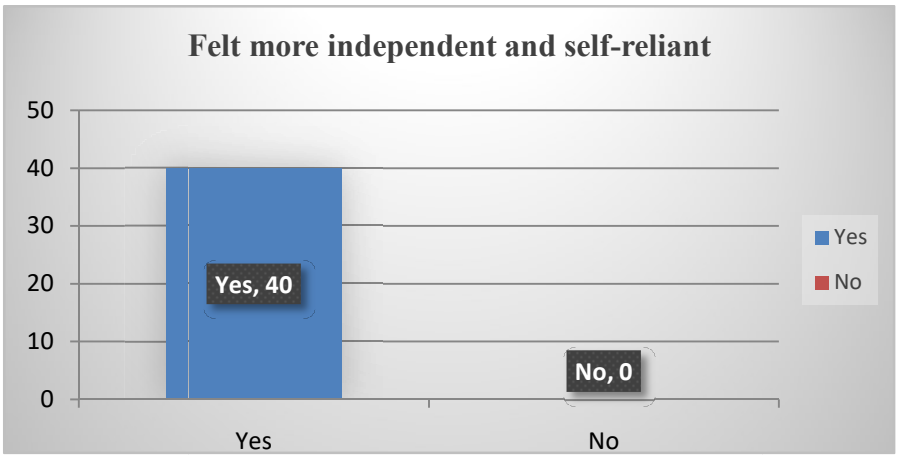


The study found that around 65% of the respondents participated in village or community meetings after becoming involved in Self-Help Groups (SHGs), while 35% reported limited participation in such activities. This finding suggests that SHGs have played an important role in increasing women's social interaction and involvement in community affairs. Through SHG activities, women received opportunities to meet regularly, share ideas, discuss common problems, and engage with other members of the community.

Participation in SHGs also helped women build confidence and improve their communication skills, encouraging them to take part in public discussions and community programmes. As a result, many women became more aware of social issues and local development activities taking place in their villages.

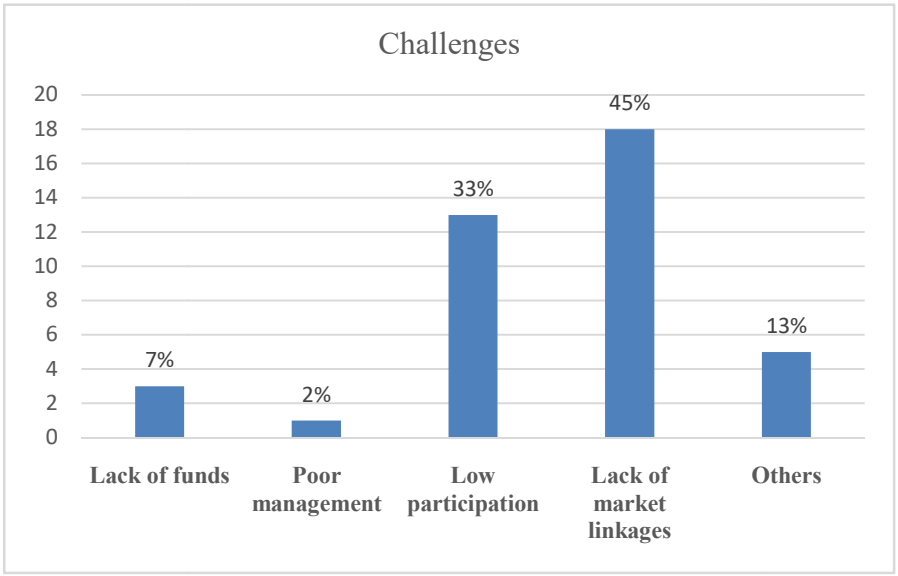
However, the findings also show that a considerable number of women still had limited participation in community meetings. This may be due to factors such as household responsibilities, lack of confidence, social restrictions, or traditional cultural norms that limit women's public involvement. Overall, the study indicates that SHGs contribute positively towards enhancing women's social participation and community engagement.

Figure 5: Has SHG participation helped you feel more independent and self-reliant in daily life?



All respondents (100%) reported feeling more independent and self-reliant after joining SHGs. Women stated that participation in SHGs improved their confidence, financial contribution, and social recognition within the household and community.

Figure 6: Biggest challenges for your SHG



The study identified lack of market linkage as the major challenge faced by Self-Help Groups (SHGs), as reported by 45% of the respondents. Many women explained that

although they were involved in small businesses and income-generating activities, they faced difficulties in finding proper markets to sell their products. Poor market access limited their opportunities to earn better profits and expand their economic activities.

About 33% of the respondents reported low participation of members as another important challenge. In some SHGs, not all members actively attended meetings or participated regularly in group activities, which affected the smooth functioning and collective progress of the group. Other challenges mentioned by the respondents included heavy household responsibilities, irregular meetings, and limited institutional support from government or other agencies. These factors often reduced the effectiveness and sustainability of SHG activities.

Some respondents also faced difficulties in maintaining records, managing finances, and accessing proper training opportunities, even though the village had a relatively high literacy level. This suggests that literacy alone may not be sufficient without practical skill training and continuous guidance for SHG members.

The findings of the study are similar to the observations made by Zhimomi (2020), who also identified poor market access, inadequate training, and limited institutional support as major challenges affecting the growth and functioning of SHGs in Nagaland. Overall, the study highlights the need for better market linkage, capacity-building programmes, regular training, and stronger institutional support to improve the performance and sustainability of SHGs.

Key Findings

- The study found that SHGs contributed positively to women's economic empowerment in Lotovi village. A majority of respondents reported improvement in household income, savings habits, and access to credit facilities after joining SHGs.
- SHGs significantly improved women's social confidence and participation. Most respondents stated that they became more confident in expressing their opinions, speaking in public, and participating in SHG and village meetings after joining the groups.
- The findings revealed that women's participation in household decision-making increased through SHG involvement. Many respondents reported greater involvement in decisions related to household expenditure, children's education, and financial matters.
- SHGs promoted financial inclusion and reduced women's dependence on informal moneylenders by providing access to savings and collateral-free loans for small businesses, household needs, and livelihood activities.
- The study identified lack of market linkages as the major challenge faced by SHGs, followed by low participation of members, household responsibilities, and occasional dominance by a few members during group decision-making.

- Although SHGs contributed positively toward women's empowerment, institutional challenges such as inadequate training, weak market access, and limited external support affected the sustainability and growth of SHG activities in the village.

Suggestions / Recommendations

Raise Awareness

Awareness programmes should be conducted to encourage more women to join SHGs and understand their economic and social benefits. This will help increase women's participation in empowerment activities.

Capacity-Building and Skill Development Programs

Vocational and entrepreneurship training should be provided to SHG members to improve their livelihood opportunities and income-generating activities.

Provide Market Linkages and Marketing Support

Government agencies and NGOs should help SHGs access better markets and promote their products. Improved market linkage can increase income and business growth.

Enhance Financial Literacy

Regular training on savings, budgeting, and financial management should be conducted to strengthen women's financial independence and management skills.

Develop Leadership and Communication Skills

Leadership and communication training should be encouraged to improve women's confidence, decision-making ability, and participation in community activities.

Strengthen Group Unity and Cooperation

Efforts should be made to promote unity, cooperation, and mutual support among SHG members. Strong group relationships will reduce conflicts and improve the effectiveness of group activities.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Self-Help Groups (SHGs) play an important role in promoting women's empowerment and sustainable rural development in Lotovi Village under Niuland District, Nagaland. The findings revealed that SHGs improved women's savings habits, access to credit, livelihood opportunities, confidence, and participation in household and community decision-making. SHG participation also strengthened women's financial independence, social interaction, and leadership abilities through collective support and group activities. However, challenges such as

poor market access, limited institutional support, irregular participation, and traditional gender roles continue to affect the sustainability of SHGs. Therefore, strengthening financial literacy, skill development, institutional support, and market linkages is essential for ensuring long-term empowerment and sustainable growth of SHGs in rural communities.

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Women Entrepreneurship in Floriculture: Exploring Sustainable Livelihood Opportunities in Senapati District, Manipur

Sani Koshia[1]
Dr. Abel Ariina[2]

Abstract

Women's entrepreneurship plays an important role in promoting sustainable livelihoods, economic independence, and social development, especially in rural areas. In Northeast India, floriculture has emerged as a growing livelihood opportunity due to favourable climatic conditions and increasing market demand for flowers. The present study examines women entrepreneurs engaged in floriculture business in Senapati District, Manipur, particularly in Makhan Centre, Lovadziingho, Tadubi, and Mao Gate. The study explores the socio-economic background of the respondents, the factors motivating them to engage in floriculture, and the challenges they face in managing their businesses. A mixed-method descriptive research design was adopted, and data were collected from 40 women entrepreneurs through interview schedules and informal interactions using purposive sampling. The findings reveal that floriculture has contributed positively to women's income, confidence, and social participation. However, respondents also face challenges such as limited financial support, transportation difficulties, seasonal market fluctuations, and lack of training opportunities. The study highlights the importance of institutional support, market access, and skill development programmes in strengthening women-led floriculture enterprises and promoting sustainable livelihood opportunities in the region.

***Keyword**: Women Entrepreneurship, Floriculture, Sustainable Livelihood, Northeast India, Rural Development.*

Introduction:

Entrepreneurship has become an important mechanism for economic growth, employment generation, and social transformation across developing countries. In India, entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed as a pathway towards self-reliance, particularly in rural and economically marginalised regions where formal employment opportunities remain limited. Women's participation in entrepreneurship has gained growing attention because of its contribution to household income, gender equality, and community development.

Within this wider context, floriculture has emerged as a promising livelihood enterprise that combines economic potential with cultural significance. Floriculture

[1]Sani Koshia, Researcher, North East Institute of Social Sciences and Research (NEISSR), Nagaland. Mobile No. 8415940864. Email ID : kukuekhe@gmail.com

[2]Dr. Abel Ariina, Assistant professor, NEISSR, Nagaland. Mobile No. 8974894531. Email: abel_ariina@ymail.com

refers to the cultivation, management, and commercial use of flowers and ornamental plants. Apart from its commercial value, floriculture is deeply associated with cultural practices, religious rituals, festivals, and social ceremonies in many parts of India. In Manipur, flowers such as rose, marigold, chrysanthemum, and gladiolus hold significant cultural importance and are widely used during weddings, funerals, and community events.

In Northeast India, entrepreneurship plays a particularly crucial role due to geographical isolation, limited industrialisation, and inadequate employment opportunities. Manipur, predominantly agrarian in nature, depends heavily on agriculture and allied sectors for livelihood generation. In Senapati district, favourable climatic conditions, fertile soil, and moderate temperatures have encouraged the growth of floriculture activities over the years. Women in the region actively participate in flower cultivation, bouquet preparation, and flower marketing through local markets and informal networks.

Despite the growing involvement of women in floriculture, the sector remains largely informal and underdeveloped. Women entrepreneurs often operate without formal business training, adequate financial support, organised market structures, or access to modern technologies. Market fluctuations, poor transportation facilities, and limited institutional assistance continue to affect the sustainability of their enterprises. Existing studies on women entrepreneurship in India have mainly focused on urban-based enterprises, while limited empirical attention has been given to agrarian and region-specific enterprises in Northeast India.

The present study therefore attempts to examine women entrepreneurs engaged in floriculture business in Senapati District, Manipur, focusing on their socio-economic background, entrepreneurial motivations, and challenges faced in sustaining their enterprises. The study is particularly relevant within the framework of social entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihood development, as it highlights the role of women-led enterprises in promoting local economic growth and community welfare.

Review of Literature

Panda (2024) in the study on women entrepreneurship in India highlighted those women entrepreneurs play an important role in promoting economic growth and self-reliance. The study identified major challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, including limited access to credit, lack of training, mobility restrictions, and socio-cultural barriers. The researchers also emphasised the importance of government support and entrepreneurship development programmes in strengthening women-led enterprises.

Naude (2010) in the study *"Entrepreneurship, Developing Countries, and Development Economics"*, explained that entrepreneurship plays an important role in economic development, employment generation, and poverty reduction, particularly in developing countries. The study highlighted those entrepreneurial activities

contribute to livelihood improvement and social transformation by creating opportunities for income generation and self-employment.

Minniti (2010) discovered that women entrepreneurship in rural area contributes significantly to household welfare, community development, and economic participation. The study further observed that women entrepreneurs often face challenges related to finance, institutional support, and balancing domestic responsibilities with business activities.

Bachaspatimayum (2020) in a study on women's participation in the informal market economy of Manipur found that Manipuri women have historically played a significant role in trade and market activities. The study highlighted that women's active participation in local markets contributes to household income, economic independence, and social empowerment.

Todi (2021) in the study *"Floriculture as an Entrepreneurial Venture: Problems and Prospects"*, observed that floriculture has emerged as a promising enterprise due to increasing market demand, employment opportunities, and income-generating potential. However, the study also identified challenges such as transportation difficulties, perishability of flowers, lack of cold storage facilities, and inadequate marketing support.

A study by H.M.P.M. Dayarathne et al. (2020) found that many women entered the floriculture business mainly to improve their family income and livelihood opportunities. The study highlighted several challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, including lack of capital, poor transportation, limited market access, and inadequate training opportunities. The researchers suggested that financial support, skill training, and government assistance are important for strengthening women entrepreneurship in floriculture.

Mehta (2025) discovered that agricultural entrepreneurship among women in Northeast India contributes to sustainable livelihood development and women empowerment. The study further noted that women entrepreneurs engaged in agricultural activities develop greater confidence, decision-making abilities, and social participation within their communities.

A study titled *"Peri Urban Floriculture: A Comparative Study from NCR on Production, Value Addition, Marketing and Constraints*"(2024) found that floriculture is an important source of income, employment, and entrepreneurship opportunities for small and marginal farmers. The study highlighted several challenges faced by floriculture growers, including marketing problems, transportation difficulties, price fluctuations, and limited infrastructure. The researchers emphasized the need for better market facilities, improved transportation, and training support for the growth and development of the floriculture sector.

A review study on "*Indian Floriculture: Current Issues and Initiatives"* highlighted the growing importance of floriculture as a profitable agricultural and entrepreneurial activity in India that supports employment generation and rural development. The

study identified several challenges in the floriculture sector, including lack of storage facilities, perishability of flowers, limited market access, and inadequate technical knowledge among growers. The researchers emphasized that government support, proper policies, and technical assistance can strengthen the floriculture industry and promote sustainable livelihood opportunities and economic empowerment, especially in rural areas.

Study titled "Cultivating Change: Exploring the Role of Floriculture in Sustainable Development among the Mao Tribe in Manipur" (Maheo et al., 2022) found that floriculture has become an important livelihood activity among the Mao community in Manipur. The study revealed that many women started flower cultivation as a hobby, which later developed into a small-scale business and source of income. It also highlighted that floriculture improved the livelihood of women and contributed to sustainable development despite challenges such as lack of training, infrastructure, and market support.

Devi & Singh, (2015) a study on "Women's Role in Agriculture and Allied Fields in Manipur" explained that women in Manipur play an important role in agriculture, horticulture, and other livelihood activities. The study found that women are actively involved in income-generating activities and contribute significantly to household economy and rural development. It also emphasized that women face challenges related to resources, marketing, and workload, but their participation remains important for livelihood security and economic empowerment in Manipur.

Research Methodology

The study adopted a mixed-method descriptive research design to understand the experiences of women entrepreneurs engaged in floriculture in Senapati District, Manipur. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Primary data were collected from 40 women entrepreneurs through interview schedules and informal interactions using purposive sampling technique. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, research articles, government reports, and online sources related to women entrepreneurship, floriculture, and sustainable livelihood. The study was conducted in selected areas of Senapati District, namely Makhan Centre, Lovadziingho, Tadubi, and Mao Gate, where floriculture activities are commonly practised.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and simple tables, while qualitative responses were interpreted through thematic analysis to understand the motivations, challenges, experiences, and future aspirations of the respondents. The mixed-method approach helped the researcher to gather both numerical data and detailed personal experiences from the participants. The study also aimed to understand how floriculture contributes to the livelihood and economic empowerment of women in the study area. Special attention was given to identifying the social, financial, and marketing challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. The

research further explored the role of family support, training opportunities, and market access in the development of floriculture businesses. Overall, the study provides a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges of women entrepreneurship in floriculture and highlights its importance as a sustainable livelihood activity in Senapati District.

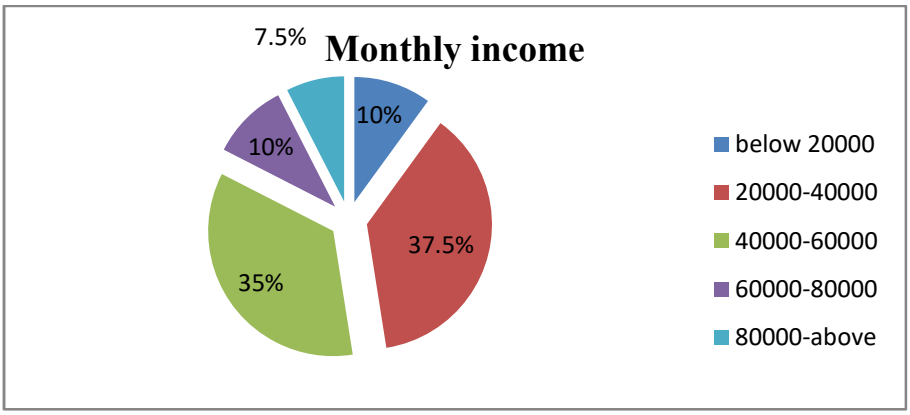
Objectives of the Study

- To assess the socio-economic profile of women entrepreneurs engaged in floriculture business.
- To identify the motivating factors that influence women's participation.
- To examine the challenges in sustaining and expanding their floriculture enterprises.

Status of women entrepreneur in floriculture in Mao Senapati District, Manipur.

The socio-economic profile of the respondents is an important aspect of understanding the economic condition and livelihood status of women entrepreneurs engaged in floriculture business. Monthly income, in particular, reflects the extent to which floriculture contributes to women's financial stability and household welfare. The following figure presents the monthly income distribution of the respondents.

Fig 1Monthly income of women running a florist business



Source: Field Data, 2026

The figure shows that the majority of respondents (35%) started floriculture businesses because of their passion for flowers and creative interest. Many women were attracted to the beauty of flowers and enjoyed activities such as flower arrangement, gardening, and decoration. This shows that personal interest and creativity play an important role in encouraging women to enter the floriculture business.

The second largest group of respondents (22.5%) started the business mainly for income generation. This indicates that floriculture is also seen as an important source of livelihood and financial support for women and their families. Around 20% of the respondents were influenced by friends or peers who motivated them to take up the business, while 10% joined floriculture due to encouragement and support from family members. This highlights the importance of social support and positive influence in motivating women entrepreneurs.

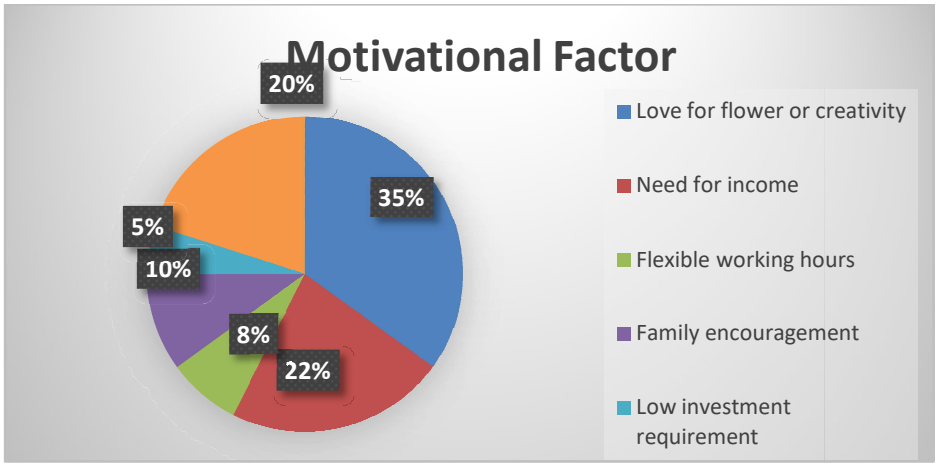
A smaller proportion of respondents considered flexible working hours (7.5%) and low investment requirements (5%) as important reasons for starting the business. These factors may be helpful especially for women who want to manage both household responsibilities and income-generating activities at the same time.

Overall, the findings indicate that women's participation in floriculture entrepreneurship is influenced by both personal passion and economic necessity. The study also shows that creativity, family support, peer encouragement, and the opportunity to earn an income motivate women to engage in floriculture as a sustainable livelihood activity.

Motivating Factors Influencing Women's Participation in Floriculture Entrepreneurship

Understanding the motivating factors behind women's participation in floriculture entrepreneurship is important in analysing their entrepreneurial interests and livelihood choices. The following figure presents the major motivations for starting florist businesses among the respondents.

Fig.2 Motivational Factor to start a florist business



Source: Field Data, 2026

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Table 3 Challenges Faced in sustaining and expanding

Challenges Faced	Description of Responses
Financial constraints	Limited access to loans and insufficient capital for business expansion.
Transportation and marketing difficulties	Poor transportation facilities, limited market access, and difficulty promoting products.
Seasonal demand fluctuations	Unstable income due to changes in customer demand during different seasons.
Lack of training opportunities	Inadequate access to entrepreneurship, floral arrangement, and digital marketing training.
Storage and perishability issues	Absence of proper storage facilities leading to damage and wastage of flowers.
Balancing family and business responsibilities	Difficulty managing household responsibilities alongside business activities.

Source: Field Data, 2026.

The findings show that women entrepreneurs involved in floriculture face many challenges that affect the growth of their businesses. One of the main problems faced by the respondents is financial difficulty. Many women have limited access to loans and do not have enough capital to expand their businesses. Because of this, they find

it difficult to buy quality materials, improve production, and increase their market opportunities.

Another important challenge faced by the respondents is transportation and marketing problems. Poor transportation facilities and limited market access make it difficult for women to deliver flowers on time and sell their products to more customers. Many respondents also face difficulties in promoting and advertising their products effectively.

The respondents also reported seasonal demand as a major challenge. The demand for flowers mainly increases during festivals, weddings, and special occasions. During other seasons, sales become low, which affects their income and financial stability.

Lack of training opportunities was also identified as a major issue. Many respondents said they do not receive enough training in entrepreneurship, floral arrangement, business management, and digital marketing. This affects their skills, confidence, and ability to improve their businesses.

Storage and perishability problems were also commonly mentioned. Since flowers spoil quickly, the absence of proper storage facilities often leads to damage and wastage, causing financial loss to the entrepreneurs.

In addition, many women respondents find it difficult to balance family responsibilities and business activities. Managing household work along with business creates stress and sometimes affects their business performance.

Overall, the findings show that floriculture provides income and livelihood opportunities for women entrepreneurs, but several financial, marketing, training, and family-related challenges still affect the development and success of their businesses.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions and recommendations are proposed to strengthen women-led floriculture enterprises and promote sustainable livelihood opportunities:

- Facilitating Market Linkages and Exposure: Government departments such as National Horticulture Board and National Rural Livelihoods Mission can organize local flower exhibitions, trade fairs, and buyer & seller meets. These platforms will help women florists connect directly with wholesalers, event planners, and urban markets, reducing dependency on intermediaries.
- Improving Access to Financial Resources: Financial institutions and schemes like PradhanMantri Mudra Yojana, Micro Small Medium Enterprise and Stand-Up India Scheme should be actively promoted through awareness camps at the community level. Local self-help groups (SHGs) can act as facilitators to assist women in loan applications, documentation, and financial literacy.
- Organizing Skill Development and Training Programs: Training initiatives can be conducted in collaboration with agricultural universities, Krishi Vigyan Kendras

(KVKs), and NGOs. These programs should focus on nursery management, modern floriculture techniques, floral arrangement, packaging, and entrepreneurship skills to improve both productivity and market competitiveness.

- Promoting Digital Literacy and Online Marketing: Workshops on digital skills should be organized to train women entrepreneurs in using platforms such as WhatsApp Business, Facebook, and Instagram for marketing. Creating collective online pages for local florists can further enhance visibility and customer reach.
- Developing Infrastructure and Supply Chain Support: The government, in collaboration with local bodies, should invest in cold storage facilities, transportation systems, and local flower markets. This will help reduce post-harvest losses and maintain the quality of flowers during transit.
- Formation of Cooperative Societies and Producer Groups: Women florists can be encouraged to form cooperatives or producer groups. These collectives can combine resources, standardize pricing, and improve bargaining power, thereby increasing income and market access.
- Awareness and Outreach Programs on Government Support: Regular awareness campaigns should be conducted at the village and district levels to inform women about subsidies, training programs, and entrepreneurship schemes. Community-based organizations can play a key role in mobilization and information dissemination.
- Encouraging Sustainable Floriculture Practices: Training on eco-friendly practices such as organic cultivation, water conservation, and biodegradable packaging should be promoted. This not only ensures environmental sustainability but also opens opportunities in niche markets that prefer sustainable products.

Conclusion

The study highlights the growing role of women entrepreneurs in the floriculture sector and their contribution to sustainable livelihood and economic empowerment in Senapati District, Manipur. The findings reveal that women engage in florist businesses mainly due to personal interest, creativity, and the need for financial independence. Floriculture has positively contributed to household income, self-confidence, and family welfare among the respondents.

However, women entrepreneurs continue to face challenges such as limited access to finance, transportation and marketing difficulties, seasonal demand fluctuations, and lack of training opportunities. Despite these challenges, many respondents expressed interest in expanding their businesses and improving their services through better market exposure and digital promotion.

The study concludes that women entrepreneurship in floriculture has significant potential for promoting women empowerment, livelihood security, and local economic development. Strengthening institutional support, financial assistance,

training programmes, and market linkages can further enhance the growth and sustainability of women-led floriculture enterprises.

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Changing Family Structures and Quality of Life of Tribal Older Persons

Stephen Jeng Ronghi[1]
Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai[2]

Abstract

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India (2021), about 10% of India's population is aged 60 years and above. Healthy aging emphasizes older people's quality of life and acknowledges that physical, psychological, social, and environmental factors are important in achieving it. Psychosocial factors that attribute to the high quality of life are – absence of disease or infirmity, financial stability, mental wellbeing, independence, social support, healthy family functioning, resilience, opportunities to grow physically, socially and psychologically. Well-being emphasizes on how the family, society, and Government policies are enacted and directed towards the welfare of the older people. This paper broadly aims to investigate the quality of life, with an aim to understand the changing family structures and its effects on the welfare of the tribal older persons. This paper is prepared with secondary data collected from journals, books and published reports of the NGOs and Government. The study tries to indicate the family dynamics and psychosocial factors contributing to the quality of life of tribal older persons. It emphases on the modernization, globalization, and migration aspects of the family dynamics and its effects on the tribal older persons. Some recommendations for upliftment of the quality of life of the tribal older persons were also laid down in this paper.

Keywords: *Quality of Life, Tribal Older Persons, Family Dynamics, Psychosocial Factors, Wellbeing.*

1. Introduction

Aging is an inevitable phenomenon of life cycle which is certain. It has various dimension when understanding of the older person life experience. Beyond simply avoiding disease, healthy aging is the act of acquiring and maintaining the useful abilities that promote well-being in old age. The World Health Organization (WHO) has propagated that quality of life of an individual is "an individual's perception of life in the context of culture and value system in which the individual lives and in relation to person's goals, expectations, standards, and concerns". The world is transforming from through various generation and centuries which has brought changes in the life style of human being.

[1] Stephen Jeng Ronghi, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar-788011, India. Email:sronghi@gmail.com

[2] Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai, Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar-788011, India, Email- sukai.tarun@gmail.com

In the contemporary world, globalization and modernization go hand in hand not only as a sign of economic development, but also as deep change of society. These processes mark the integration, interpenetration and fusion of different cultures, values, and ways of life into a single integrated worldwide community. Modernization refers to the change in techniques, urbanization, system development of previously closed communities, while globalization is a means to allow the movement of information, money, people, and culture across borders. The factors like migration of the earning family member to urbanization for the good life which has the transformation of the traditional tribal family structure. There are push and pull factors in the migration of the tribal people as the government reported (Disha Foundation, 2020).

1.1 Push Factor:

a) Villages or small-town could not provide employment for the people.
b) Lack of opportunities for employment in village or small-town areas.
c) Wage difference in villages and modern urban states.
d) Educational status which is considerably low in the local youth of the village has a detrimental cause.
e) Skill based training and revenue generation opportunities in the traditional agriculture farming, forestry-based opportunities and its alternative sectors in tribal areas still remain largely in a growing state, which still needs to catch its pace with modern infrastructure.
f) Population pressure and declining landholdings.
g) Land Alienation a means for development projects leading to displacement and migration and under compensation, besides income poverty and deprivation such as not having access to high quality healthcare and education.
h) Lack of awareness and resources about existing welfare programmes meant for tribals.

1.2 Pull Factor:

a) More job opportunities in real estate and construction industries in states like Kerala, Maharashtra and other major cities.
b) More beneficial welfare schemes for social security
c) Better wages and better household in the state of destination.
d) More lucrative job markets.
e) Migrant labourers preferred higher indexing states.
f) There are better wages and engagement at destination state.
g) More appealing and lucrative urban life styles has attracted the tribal youth.

The pull and push factors of migration of the native work force and family have changed the traditional family structure among the tribal society. The changes are

regarded as form of traditional joint family to nuclear family, though which the older person becomes vulnerable and marginalized in the tribal society.

According to the Ministerial survey, by Indian Government (2021), about 10% population of India is aged above 60 years. Similarly, a report of NABARD has suggested that a large number of the tribal agricultural workforce is transforming to other occupation in sectors like Industrial labour, construction labour, electricity trade, transport, hotel and restaurant (Das, 2023). The transformation has brought changes in the family lifestyle and habits too. The transformation has largely affected tribal population of the older generation as it has brought changes in the psychosocial aspects and their quality of life.

1.3 Psychosocial factors and Quality of life

Healthy aging emphasizes older people's quality of life and acknowledges that physical, psychological, social, and environmental factors are important in achieving a standard quality of life. Psychosocial factors that attribute to the high quality of life are – absence of disease or infirmity, financial stability, mental wellbeing, independence, social support, healthy family functioning, resilience, opportunities to grow physically, socially and psychologically. These factors that serve as pillars to enhance quality of life of older people, and when these factors are inaccessible, it results in decreased quality of life. These factors vary in accordance by socioeconomic status and culture. Psychosocial factors attribute to the quality of life such as absence of disease or infirmity, financial stability, mental wellbeing, independence, social support, healthy family functioning, resilience, opportunities to grow physically, socially and psychologically. Any change in these factors will impact the factors that are indicators of quality of life, so it's important to examine the factors that will affect the dynamics of healthy aging including the mental health of older persons.

1.4 Family functioning, Wellbeing and Quality of life

Wellbeing emphasizes on how the family, society, and Government policies are enacted and directed towards the welfare of the older people. Social support acts as a buffer in the time of crisis and stressful situation; it is conceptualized as a positive factor in aid in the maintenance of health (Zimet et al., 1988). Therefore, in order to comprehend the quality of life of the elderly, it is crucial to know how they feel about the help they received from family members during the caregiving process. The basic assistance that an older person receives for his/her wellbeing is basically from the family and caregivers. For the older person, family is regarded as a unique source of support; family functioning has pivotal role in regaining from a crisis situation. It refers to the system in which all stake holders of the unit i.e. family interact, forming a dynamic relationship in which values and behaviour are constantly being shaped. Family functioning is a sequential aspect of family environment in which the

physical, social and emotional health of individuals may affect. What happens within a family and how the family functions are the crucial factors in creating flexibility and mitigating current and future risk associated with unfortunate events and unsuitable conditions (Bahremand et al., 2015).

2. Review of literature

2.1 Quality of life and Psychosocial factors

Sowmiya & Nagarani (2012) carried out research to evaluate the quality of life in the older population residing in Tamil Nadu's rural area and along with it to explore the factors influencing their quality of life. The author highlighted that deteriorationin quality of life inverse with the increasing age. Marital status impacts the quality of life which the author suggests that married older person has improved quality of life than older person who are single, divorced and separated. The author also suggests that older person living arrangements along with own family members and supported by the family members have higher quality of life then older person living alone or separately from their offspring.

Dongre and Deshmukh (2012) carried out their research to comprehend the social determinants of quality of older persons' life and their perspectives on various challenges surrounding their life. The authors had determined that how a person physical health is acknowledged by understanding the working status, care of the family members, and involvement in social activities. Psychological supports were recognised by health insurance and working status. Social relations were determined by membership in social groups and relationships with the family members. The authors had explained that factor such as active life, social activity, spirituality, health care, involvement in decision making and welfare schemes of the government determine the better quality of life.

Pilania et al. (2019) had done a systematic review to measure the exsistance of depression among older population in India. The authors suggested that existence of depression among Indian older population is 34.4%. The existence of depression was higher among females, rural populations, and in the eastern part of the country.

Brahmbhatt and Shah (2019) in their study tried to study the health profile, socio-demographic factors, and psychosocial aspects of the older people in old-age homes. The author suggested that older person in old age homes had educational status till the primary level, they were mostly widow or widower and belongs to lower socio-economic status. The author had mentioned that majority of the older person living in old age home was due to family conflict, disability of self or spouse and financial issues. The author identified that the older person living in the old age home had high prevalence rate of hypertension, joint pain and other symptoms related to depression. Accordingly, the author suggests that the older person had mostly physical and psychological issues. Thus, the author tries to indicate that low quality of life prevailed among the older person living in old age home.

Vimala and Phalke (2020) carried out a study on to assess the health problems and psychosocial problems and its association with socio-demographic attributes. The author indicated that cognitive impairment, depression, and psychosocial issues were highly prevalent in the older people residing in the tribal area. The author indicated that prevalence of life style habits like consumption of alcohol and tobacco was higher among the respondents.

Sindhu et al. (2022) carried out their study to measure the existence of anxiety and depression among the older tribal population and assess the socio demographic variables related with it. The author had observed that the most of the older person were illiterate. Anxiety had frequency rate of 8.2% of which 4.7% had mild, 2.9% had moderate, and 0.6% had severe anxiety. The existence of depression was 22.4%, of which 18.9% had moderate and 3.5% had severe depression. Anxiety is influenced by occupation, financial dependency, and co-morbid status. Depression is influence by occupation, marital status, living status, financial dependency, personal habits, comorbidity status, gender, and functional disability.

Soren et al. (2022) in their research to measure the four domains of quality of life i.e. physical, psychological, social, and environmental domain. The author had pointed out that most of the respondents were from rural background, illiterate and depends on pension for livelihood. The author suggested that low socio-economic status, illiterate, person living in nuclear family, person with more co-morbidity and financially dependent on others and zero activities of daily living are the significant factors of low quality of life among the tribal older person.

Vimala & Phalke (2020) carried out a study to assess the health problems and psychosocial problems of elderly population residing at tribal area, and its association with socio-demographic attributes. The author indicates that cognitive impairment, depression, and psychosocial issues were highly prevalent in the older people in the tribal area.

2.2 Family functioning and Quality of life

Wang, & Zhao, (2012) carried out research on to access the relationship between geriatric depression and its association with factors like family functioning and social support in mainland China. The authors reveal that the older person diagnosed with major depression had worse family functioning and lower social support than without depression. The author had run a multivariate linear regression analysis which showed that the older people who are single in marital status, lower social assistance and unhealthy family functioning had depressive symptoms.

Lu et al. (2017) carried out research and was done so it can be hypothesized that the relationship between family function and quality of life is mediated by both resilience and depression the findings reveal that Depression has a negative impact on family functioning, resilience and quality of life, while resilience improves the family functioning and their quality of life. Family functioning has indirect effects through

resilience and depression; combined on Quality of Life. The relationship between family functioning and quality of life among the older person is mediated by depression and resilience.

Shabani et al. (2023) carried out research to evaluate how gender influences the relationships between social support services and life's quality among Iranian older adults. The author highlights that social assistance given to the older person has a positively and significant influencein their quality of life. Practical help, interacting positively, and supporting affectionately is a significant predictor of quality of life. Self-care was improved with high social assistance in males but was opposite in females. Thus, it indicated that improvement in social support and better family functioning has impact on better quality of life.

Kumari (2019) in her study tried to understand the psychosocial problem among the older person and the ways of the family support toward them. The author had suggested that those older persons lacking family support experience greater psycho-social difficulties as compared with the persons who have access to family support who face relatively fewer challenges. The author had indicated that the behaviour of the younger generation towards the older generation is negative which has led to less or moderate care for the older people. The prescribe traditional joint family is declining which has led to less role of the older people in the family. The author had indicated that the intra-familial relation and family functioning is unhealthy mostly with the female older person.

3. Methodology

3.1 Objectives

- To identify the various psychosocial factors among tribal older persons in India.
- To understand the effects of family support and wellbeing on the quality of life of older persons.

3.2 Research Design

This study was attempted with an aim to comprehensively explore quality of life among tribal older people in India and the impact on their quality of life. It discusses various measures to enhance their quality of life; thus, considering the nature of the objectives, the current study used a Descriptive research design.

3.3 Source of Data

Secondary data are imported from the available research articles, conference papers, Government reports, journal publications, etc.

4. Discussion

The Family dynamics and various psychosocial factors have impacted on the quality of life for older people in India, especially among tribal cultures. The paper has provided a thorough understanding of how the lived experiences of the older people have been encouraged by the various aspects, like marital status, family support, mental health, socioeconomic status and cultural aspects. The discussion has tried to look through the lance of globalization, modernization and migration in regards with the change in family structure of the tribal older person.

Most of the studies has tried to highlight the positive impact of the family support and the positive psychosocial impact for the improved quality of life of the tribal older people. Sowmiya &Nagarani (2012) and Dongre & Deshmukh (2012) has propagated that older persons who have been married or living with their family reported better well-being, while those that are single, divorced, or living alone tend to experience lower quality of life. Similarly, the presence of active social roles, participation in decision-making, and access to welfare schemes significantly enhance perceived quality of life.

Psychosocial Factors Affecting Quality of Life

Health and Functionality: The presence of any morbidity relating to the physical and psychological as found in relevant studyhas a detrimental effect on the life of older people (Lu et al., 2017; Sindhu et al., 2022; Soren et al., 2022; Vimala & Phalke, 2020). The inability to perform the daily task due to the old age and the lack of proper nutrients and required energy was observed as factors which contribute to the quality of life of tribal older person. The adaptation of the modern technique for health treatment is of positive aspects but the traditional practices of still consulting the quack doctors are the major factors in persistent low quality of life among the tribal older person.

Financial Stability: In maximum of the related studies, it was found that lack of finance and dependency on family members and others for finance, deteriorates the quality of life of older people. The lack of financial stability among the tribal families in the rural area leads to migration for better job security and change in family structure leaving behind the older people alone and vulnerable. The financial independence which has showed higher quality of life in some study is due to their socioeconomic background, educational status and awareness about the various government schemes. The welfare schemes of government for the tribal older people do not reach to the beneficiaries have many loopholes as many of the tribal older people do not know about those schemes. People who are aware of those schemes face challenges in registration with lack of accessibility to register. The registered older person availing the schemes are not pleased with the benefits received as most of the amount are used in travelling, medical bills and contribution for family support (Thirumalraja, 2013). Poverty and un-employability in the old age resist in the old

people from getting financial stability. Thus, financial stability is a vital factor which contributes to the quality of life of the tribal older person.

Mental Well-being: Depression, anxiety and stress are seen as the common mental health issues in the Indian population which has a prevalence rate of 34.4% as reported in a study by Pilania et al., (2019). The prevalence rate is higher among older female and rural population which might be due to the low educational status, no social support, family conflict and low socio-economic status (Sindhu et al. 2022). Family members to urban area has divided the family workforce and the disrupted the homeostasis of the family, leaving behind the older people to sustain life in their own which deteriorates the mental status of the older people. Substance abuse is prominent for the tribal older population which has a detrimental effect on the life of the person and the family (Vimala & Phalke, 2020). Substance abuse has various contributing factor such as drainage of economy of the family, family dispute, lack of emotional support. The family functioning becomes unhealthy with the family in substance abuse.

Social Support: Tribal culture is embedded with rituals and belief system which helps in the healthy functioning of the society and as its characteristic it has a tradition of taking part in upkeeping of the older peoples by the members of the family. The system has been prevailing for generations but with changes in the societal system to modernization and welfare, many developments took place and one such development is the old age home to care for the old age people. The study of an old age home discloses that the older people come to them due to various factors such as incompetency of the family to care for the older people, financial instability, family conflict, and disability to take care of self or spouse (Brahmbhatt and Shah, 2019). Displacement and land alienation for the developmental projects has scattered the once united tribal society living in one village together as one into history of the past. Thus, leading to weak social support among the members as one member of the family gets away from the other due to occupational change and migration to urbanization (Babu, 2021; Sapre & Gori, 2023). The strong bonding of togetherness is gradually declining which makes the older people marginalized and vulnerable.

Healthy Family Functioning: Healthy family functioning is a general concept but as for the tribal culture it has the concepts of intergenerational bonds between children, parents and grandparents which foster the healthy functioning of the tribal family. Taking care of the older people in tribal society is considered as a pride honour of the children. Taking care of the family member's especially older people is a matter of serious concern as it needs time, energy and efforts. Studies reveals that caregiving is burdensome and the care giver many of the times feels distress, frustrated leading to conflict among the family members. Family members and caregivers play a crucial role involved in care giving towards the older person, which is pertinent in the understanding older persons' quality of life. The older person's inability to perform everyday tasks, as well as to address their physical, psychological, and social issues, has a detrimental impact on family members. Due to this, family members very often experience social, financial, and mental repercussions. Family members and

caregivers in the process of care giving might feel burnouts, burden and overwhelm at times leading to mental health issues like depression and stress.

5. Recommendations

- **Improved Healthcare Access:** Special health camp should be setup for the geriatric population so the monthly check-up for the older people can be made affordable.

- **Nutritional Support Program:** The government should implement government-sponsored nutrition programs tailored for the needs of the tribal older population.

- **Financial literacy and Awareness Campaign:** The government welfare schemes for the older people should be promoted and awareness campaign should be conducted in the remote tribal areas. Along with the awareness campaign registration for the government schemes for the older people should be made easily accessible and simplifies the registration process.

- **Mental health Support:** The mental health professional should be appointed at the grassroots level to give supportive and necessary counselling. The government should establish community base mental health programs specially to give awareness of the mental health problems such as depression, anxiety and substance abuse, which is found to be common among tribal older person.

- **Strengthening Social Support System:** The tribal society is rooted with love; respect and care for each other, the system at times are weakening by various factors. Traditional beliefs and custom should be strengthened and community driven initiatives for reinforced traditional caregiving practices should be integrated with modernized support structures. Frequent visit and arrangement for older peoples care by the outstation family members should be promoted and supported.

- **Caregiver Assistance Programs:** The caregivers training program of the older people should be initiated at the community to give awareness about the older people. The program should incorporate with older people's problems, need, wants and government aided schemes so as to support the caregiver. The caregiver assistance program should include about the mental health issues and stress management programs for the caregivers.

Conclusion

A comprehensive strategy is desirable to minimise the psychosocial issues influencing the quality of life of older Tribal people. Their well-being can be significantly improved by enhancing social systems, financial literacy, mental health assistance, and healthcare accessibility. Focusing on mental health support for the tribal older people can be achieved by integrating trained professionals and community cantered mental health initiatives. These measures will help address common issues like

depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Providing financial literacy programs and expanding access to government welfare schemes will help older people achieve a degree of economic independence, reducing their dependency on family members for financial stability. The importance and awareness about the strong family bonding with the older people should be promoted and promulgated to the migrated family members who have gone in search for better lifestyle to urban area.

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Use of Internet for Educational Purposes among School-Going Adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam

Sampita Das[1]
Dr. G. Albin Joseph[2]

Abstract

Adolescents are increasingly depending on internet resources for their academic learning. The study focuses on patterns of internet usage, educational benefits, and challenges linked with digital learning in Barak Valley, Assam. A descriptive research design was adopted for the study. An online questionnaire was used to collect data from 150 secondary and higher secondary students in Barak Valley, Assam. The study found that smartphones emerged as the main device for educational activities, while platforms such as YouTube, Google, WhatsApp study groups, and AI-based tools were commonly used for learning purposes. The findings suggest that internet-based learning supports students in improving subject understanding and academic learning. The study identified challenges related to poor network connectivity, high data costs, distraction, and lack of guidance. The study highlights the increasing dependence on digital education and the need for better internet facilities and academic guidance, especially in rural communities. The findings may contribute to discussions on digital inclusion and educational development within the field of social work and education.

Keywords: *Internet Use, Digital learning, School-going Adolescents, Barak Valley, Assam*

Introduction

The expansion of internet services has changed the way students access education and learning resources. Internet service plays an important role for accessing information, communication, and learning among students. Digital platforms such as Google, YouTube, WhatsApp study groups, and AI-based applications are more common among adolescents. UNESCO has emphasised that digital technologies create opportunities for expanding access and improving learning experiences. Learning now takes place through both classroom teaching and online educational platforms. Internet-based learning enables students to access study materials, online tutorials, educational videos, and interactive learning platforms at any time. As noted by Cetin et al. (2023), "in today's world, it is impossible to talk about education without technology or technology without education." The increasing integration of digital tools into educational processes has further accelerated after the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools and educational institutions largely depended on online

[1] Sampita Das, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Email ID- sampita.das999@gmail.com, Phone Number- 9678724400

[2] Dr. G. Albin Joseph, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Email ID- albinjosephg@gmail.com, Phone Number- 9080838741

learning systems. Adolescence represents a significant developmental stage characterised by intellectual, emotional, and social changes. During this period, access to educational resources and learning support plays an important role in shaping academic achievement and future opportunities. Internet-based learning can positively support adolescents' academic development. Studies have shown that learners perceive digital education as convenient, flexible, and supportive for self-learning and academic engagement. At the same time, unregulated or excessive internet use may create challenges such as distraction, reduced concentration, misinformation, and dependency on digital devices.

Although digital learning has expanded significantly in India, inequalities in internet access and digital resources continue to persist. UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union reported that a large proportion of children and young people worldwide still lack internet access at home, particularly in rural and economically weaker communities. Poor network connectivity, lack of personal devices, high data costs, and limited digital guidance continue to affect effective learning among adolescents. UNICEF further observed that the "digital divide is perpetuating inequalities" among children and young people from poorer and rural households. In the context of Assam, particularly in Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi district digital learning has become increasingly relevant among school-going adolescents studying in Classes IX–XII. Students from both rural and urban areas are gradually depending on smartphones and online educational platforms for study-related activities. The use of AI-based educational tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini has also begun to influence learning practices among adolescents.

The present study seeks to examine the use of the internet for educational purposes among school-going adolescents in three district of Barak Valley, Assam. The study focuses on patterns of internet usage, educational benefits, and challenges faced by adolescents while engaging in digital learning. The findings of the study may contribute to discussions on digital inclusion, educational equity, and adolescent development within the fields of social work and education.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess awareness and patterns of internet use for educational purposes among school-going adolescents.
2. To identify the challenges faced by adolescents while using the internet for educational purposes.
3. To analyse the impact of internet use on adolescents' learning.

Review of Literature

The internet has become an important component of modern education by facilitating access to information communication and learning resources. Digital technologies have transformed traditional teaching learning processes and created opportunities for

interactive and self-directed learning. According to UNESCO (2023), degital education promotes inclusive learning and improves educational accessibility through technology-enabled educational platforms have increased the use of online learning resources among students. Cetin et al. (2023), observed that technology has become deeply integrated into educational systems and significantly influences learning processes and academic engagement. The authors noted that digital learning environments support independent and collaborative learning and easy access to academic materials. Similarly, Dhawan (2020), highlighted that online learning become a major alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic and help maintain continuity in education despite institutional closures. The study further emphasized that digital learning has encouraged innovation in teaching methodologies and student participation.

Adolescents are among the most active users of digital technology and internet based educational resources. The use of smartphones, educational applications, video based learning, and AI supported tools has become increasingly common among school-going students. The study conducted by Yengin et. al (2023), found that digital learning platforms improve students' engagement, learning flexibility, and academic understanding. It often help students complete assignments and access study materials.

Many studies have shown that educational platforms such as YouTube, Google classroom, WhatsApp study groups and AI applications support independent learning among adolescents. Kumar and Singh (2021), observed that internet based learning encourages self learning habits and improves digital literacy among secondary schools students. However, the effectiveness of digital learning largely depends on students' access to technology, internet connectivity, and proper academic guidance. Recent developments in Artificial Intelligence have also influenced educational practices among school-going adolescents. AI tools such as ChatGPT, and Gemini are increasingly used for solving academic queries, generating explanations and improving learning efficiency. Holmes et. al (2022), argued that AI has the potential to personalize learning experiences and support educational development although ethical concerns and dependency on AI tools remain important issues. Despite the growing importance of online education, many challenges continue to affect students learning experiences. Poor internet connectivity lack of personal devices distraction high data cost and limited digital literacy are common barriers faced by adolescents in learning environments. Dhawan (2020), noted that online education creates difficulties for students belonging economically weaker and rural backgrounds due to unequal access to digital infrastructure. Studies have also identified psychological and behavioral concerns associated with excessive internet use among adolescents and spending long hours online may reduce concentration in these distractions and negatively affect academic discipline. Singh and Thurman (2019), observed that although online learning robots flexibility students often face challenges related to motivation, interaction and effective time management. Another important concern relates to the absence of parental or teacher guidance in lack of proper academic

supervision may reduce the effectiveness use of the internet for educational purposes. In addition exposure to non educational content and social media destruction may reduce the effectiveness of online learning among school-going students. The concept of digital divide when refers to inequalities in access to digital technology Internet services and educational resources among different social groups rural populations, economically weaker communities and marginalized groups often experience limited access to Internet facilities and digital devices. UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (2020), reported that a large proportion of children and adolescents globally do not have reliable internet access at home, thereby affecting their educational opportunities.

In India, digital inequality remains a major challenge in rural education. Students from lower income families frequently depend on shared smartphones, limited mobile data and unstable internet connectivity for online learning. According to the National Statistical office (2021), internet access in rural housings remains significantly loyal compared to urban areas such inequalities affect students' participation in digital learning and contribute to educational disparities.

In the context of Assam and North-East India, infrastructural limitations, poor network coverage and socioeconomic disadvantages continue to ensure accessibility. Rural students often encounter challenges related to connectivity, affordability, and digital literacy. Therefore, understanding internet usage patterns and digital barriers among adolescents is important and for promoting inclusive education and development and reducing educational inequalities.

Research Gaps

Although many studies have examined internet use and digital learning among students, limited research has specifically focused on school-going adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam. Existing studies mainly discuss digital education at broader levels such as rural connectivity problems, affordability, digital inequality, and the educational impact of internet use among adolescents in North-East India remain underexplored. Therefore, the present study tried to examine the awareness, challenges and the impact of internet use for educational purposes among school-going adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam.

Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the use of the internet for educational purposes among school-going adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam. The study was conducted in the three districts of Barak Valley namely Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi covering adolescents studying at the secondary and higher secondary levels that is class IX to Class XII. A total of 150 respondents were included in the final analysis. The respondents were selected through convenience

sampling based on their availability, willingness to participate and access to internet facilities.

Primary data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire prepared through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions, Likert-scale, statements and open ended questions seeking respondent suggestion regarding the improvement of internet use for educational purposes. The questions focused on awareness and patterns of Internet use, challenges faced while using the internet for education and the impact of internet use on adolescents' learning. The Google form was circulated among respondents through teachers, personal contacts and friends to facilitate data collection from school-going adolescents in Barak Valley.

The collected data were coded, tabulated and analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. Frequency, percentage, means score analysis and graphical representations such as bar graphs were used for interpreting the findings. Responses obtained through the open-ended question were reviewed and summarized. Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS and Microsoft Excel to ensure systematic presentation and interpretation of data.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents analysis and interpretation of data collected from school-going adolescents regarding the use of the internet for educational purposes in Barak Valley, Assam. The findings are presented using tables, percentages, mean score analysis, and graphical representations. The discussion focuses on awareness and patterns of internet use, challenges faced while using the internet for education, and the impact of internet use on adolescents' learning.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N= 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	13-14 Years	12	8.0
	15-16 Years	35	23.3
	17-18 Years	66	44.0
	18 Years above	37	24.7
Gender	Female	76	49.3
	Male	74	50.7
Residence	Rural	110	73.3
	Urban	22	14.7
Class	IX	18	12.0
	X	37	24.7
	XI	51	34.0

	XII	44	29.3
District	Cachar	76	50.7
	Sribhumi	37	24.7
	Hailakandi	37	24.7

The findings from the above table show that majority of the respondents (44%) were between 17-18 years of age group, whereas 24.7% were aged 18 years and above. Female respondents constituted 50.7% were more in number compared to male respondents 49.3%. Majority of the respondents resided in rural (73.3%) areas, while only 14.7 were from urban areas. In terms of education, most of the respondents belonged to class XI (34%) and from class XII 29.3%. The district wise distribution shows that more than half of the respondents were from Cachar district (50.7%), whereas Sribhumi and Hailakandi contributed equally (24.7%).

Table2: Awareness and Patterns of Internet Use for Educational Purposes (N= 150)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness of Educational Internet Use	Yes	146	97%
	No	4	2.7
Knowledge of Educational Platforms	Yes	145	96.7
	No	5	3.3
Frequency of Internet Use	Daily	114	76.0
	Weekly	17	11.3
	Rarely	16	10.7
	Never	3	2.0
Time Spent Online for Study	Less than 1 hour	32	21.3
	1-2 hours	61	40.7
	2-3 hours	38	25.3
	More than 3 hours	19	12.7
Internet Access at Home	Yes	134	89.3
	No	16	10.7

The above table shows the awareness and patterns of internet use for educational purposes among the school going adolescents. Most of the respondents (97.3%) were aware that that internet can be used for educational purposes, whereas 96.7% had knowledge of educational platforms such as Google, YouTube etc. More than half (76%) of the respondents reported using the internet daily for their study-related activities. Regarding time spent online for study purposes, the highest proportion of the respondents (40.7%) spent 1-2 hours daily on internet based study. 89.3% of the respondents reported having regular internet access at home, this indicates that the widespread availability of internet facilities among school-going adolescents.

Table 3 (a): Challenges Faced by Respondents While Using the Internet for Educational Purposes (N=150)

Challenges Faced	Frequency	Percentage
Poor network connectivity	92	61.3
High data cost	52	34.
Distraction during online study	23	15.3
Lack of guidance	11	7.3

Table 3(a) presents the challenges faced by respondents while using the internet for educational purposes. The findings show that poor network connectivity was the most common challenge reported by the respondents (61.3%), followed by high data cost (34.7%). A smaller proportion of respondents reported distraction during online study (15.3%) and lack of guidance (7.3%) as barriers affecting effective educational use of the internet.

Table 3 (b): Satisfaction with Internet Facilities for Education

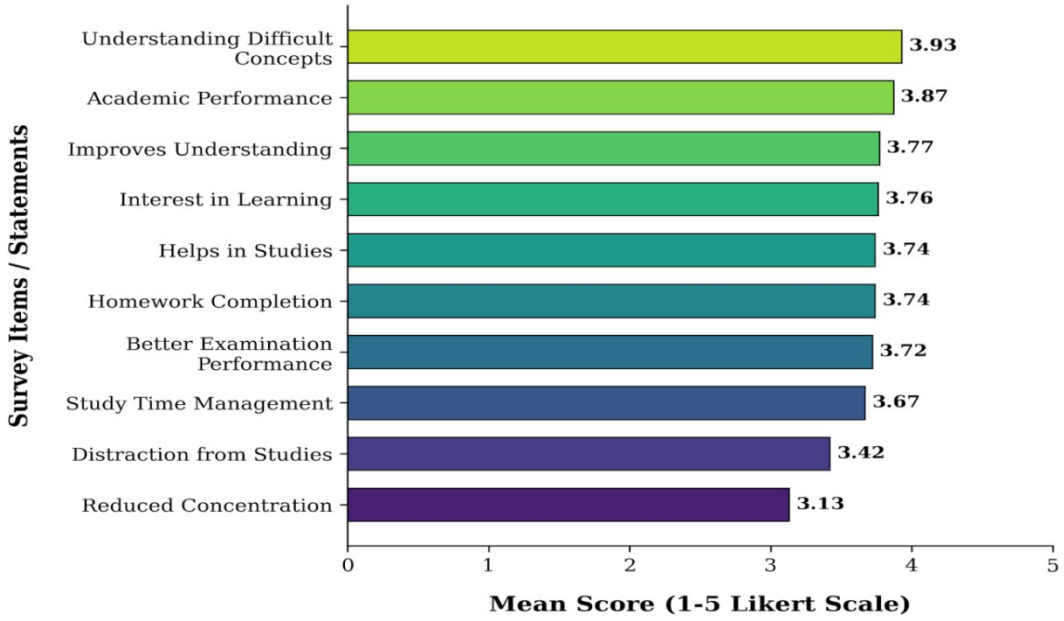
Level of Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	65	43.3
Very satisfied	34	22.7
Neutral	20	13.3
Very dissatisfied	17	11.3
Dissatisfied	12	8.0

Table 3(b) presents respondents' satisfaction with internet facilities for education. The majority of respondents were satisfied (43.3%) with the available internet facilities, while 22.7% were very satisfied. However, some respondents expressed neutral opinions (13.3%), and a smaller proportion reported dissatisfaction due to issues related to internet accessibility and connectivity.

Table 4: Mean Score Analysis of the Impact of Internet Use on Adolescents' Learning (N=150)

Statements	Mean	Interpretation
Internet helps me in my studies	3.74	Positive
Internet improves my understanding	3.77	Positive
Internet helps me complete homework	3.74	Positive
Internet improves my academic performance	3.87	Positive
Internet increases my interest in learning	3.76	Positive
Internet helps me manage my study time effectively	3.67	Positive
Internet helps me perform better in examinations	3.72	Positive
Internet helps me understand difficult concepts easily	3.93	Highly Positive
Internet use distracts me from my studies	3.42	Moderate
Using the internet reduces my concentration while studying	3.13	Moderate

Figure 1: Mean Score Analysis of the Impact of Internet Use on Adolescents' Learning



Source: Primary Data collected through Google Forms, 2026

The findings show that respondents generally perceived internet use positively in relation to their learning outcomes. The highest mean score was observed for understanding difficult concepts easily (Mean= 3.93), followed by improvement in academic performance (Mean=3.87). However, moderate mean scores for distraction and reduced concentration indicate certain negative effects associated with excessive internet use.

Discussion

The findings of the present study shows that majority of adolescents were aware about the educational use of the internet and frequently used various digital platforms for study related activities. These findings are consistent with the observations of Yengin et al. (2023), who reported that digital learning platforms improve students' engagement and academic understanding. Cetin et al. (2023) discussed that technology has become deeply integrated into educational systems and supports independent learning among students. The mean score analysis shows that internet use can positively influenced adolescents' learning, particularly in improving understanding of subjects and academic performance. This findings supports the study conducted by Kumar and Singh (2021), which observed that internet-based learning encourages self-learning habits and improves digital literacy among school-going students. Holmes et al. (2022) also emphasized that AI- supported educational tools enhance learning experiences and academic efficiency. Despite the positive

educational impact of internet use, respondents also reported several challenges such as poor network connectivity, high data costs and distraction during online studies. These findings were similar to the observations of Dhawan (2020), who noted that students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds face infrastructural barriers in accessing online education effectively. Since a large proportion of respondents belonged to rural areas, the issue of digital inequality was evident in the study. The findings support reports by UNICEF and the International Telecommunication Union (2020), which showed that lack of reliable internet access, continues to affect educational opportunities among children and adolescents, particularly in rural areas.

Conclusion and Future Implications

The present study examined the use of the internet for educational purposes among school-going adolescents in Barak Valley, Assam. It is also found that the majority of respondents were aware of educational use of the internet and they regularly used digital platforms for their study related activities. These helped them positively to improving their understanding, complete homework, better academic performance and understand difficult concepts easily. This study also identified many challenges associated with educational internet use, specially for poor network connectivity, high data costs, distraction during online study and limited guidance. Most of the respondents belonged to the rural areas and this shows the issue of digital inequality and infrastructural limitations in the regions. Overall, the study highlights the internet has emerged as an essential educational resource supporting academic learning among adolescents. Effective educational use of the internet requires balanced usage, digital awareness and improved technological systems.

Future Implications

The findings of the study suggest the need for improving digital infrastructure and internet accessibility, particularly in rural and underserved areas of Barak Valley. Educational institutions and policymakers should focus on policymakers should focus on strengthening digital learning environments, promoting digital literacy and ensuring affordable internet facilities for students. The study also shows the importance of parental and teacher guidance in encouraging productive and responsible Internet use among adolescents. Future educational initiatives may incorporate AI based learning tools classrooms and technology assisted teaching methods to enhance learning outcomes and more academic participations.

Further research may be conducted on:

- The long term impact of Internet use on school adolescence academic achievement and mental well-being.

- Comparative studies between rural and urban students regarding digital learning experiences.
- The role of artificial intelligence tools such as ChatGPT and Gemini in school education.
- Digital addiction, screen time management and behavioral changes among adolescents.

Thus, the study emphasizes that while the internet offers significant educational opportunities, effective planning, guidance, and equitable access are necessary to and ensuring inclusive and meaningful digital learning opportunities among adolescents

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Occupational Stress among Nurses: A Multiple Case Study at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Bangladesh

Arnob Sanyal[1]
Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai[2]

Abstract

Occupational stress is increasingly recognized as one of the most significant challenges affecting healthcare professionals worldwide. Nurses, as frontline healthcare workers, frequently encounter stressful situations arising from excessive workload, emotional labour, long working hours, staff shortages, workplace conflicts, and organizational pressures. Occupational stress not only affects nurses' physical and psychological well-being but also influences healthcare quality, job satisfaction, and organizational effectiveness. The present study explores occupational stress among nurses working in selected wards of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, Bangladesh. A qualitative multiple case study approach was adopted to understand the lived experiences of nurses regarding workplace stress. Five illustrative cases from the Medicine, Pediatric, Cardiology, and Gynecology wards were examined. The findings suggest that occupational stress is influenced by excessive patient load, inadequate staffing, emotional exhaustion, work–family conflict, workplace aggression, and limited organizational support. The study emphasizes the importance of psychosocial support, workplace counseling, stress management interventions, and supportive healthcare policies for improving nurses' occupational well-being.

Keywords: *Occupational Stress, Nurses, Hospital, Social Work, Bangladesh, Case Study*

Introduction

Healthcare institutions play an essential role in maintaining public health and social welfare. Among all healthcare professionals, nurses are one of the most important groups, as they are directly involved in patient care and the day to day functioning of healthcare services. Their responsibilities include Monitoring patients, administering Medications responding to emergencies maintaining records and providing emotional support to patients and their families.

Despite their crucial contribution, nursing is widely recognized as one of the most stressful professions. Nurses frequently work under physically demanding and emotionally challenging conditions. They are required to respond to emergencies, manage critically ill patients, interact with distressed family members, and perform

[1] Arnob Sanyal, PhD Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar-788011, India, Email- rjarnob1@gmail.com

[2] Prof. Tarun Bikash Sukai, Professor & Head, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar-788011, India, Email- sukai.tarun@gmail.com

multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Such conditions often create substantial occupational stress.

Occupational stress refers to the emotional, physical, and psychological strain that develops when workplace demands exceed an individual's coping capacity. Nursing professionals are particularly vulnerable because of workload pressure, shift duties, inadequate staffing, workplace violence, and organizational challenges. Research has consistently demonstrated that occupational stress contributes to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, physical illness, and decreased work performance.

In Bangladesh, public medical college and hospitals often face challenges such as overcrowding and a shortage of healthcare personnel. As a result, nurses are required to care for a large number of patients, which increases their workload and stress levels. Nurses working in tertiary level hospitals frequently experience both physical and emotional strain while carrying out their professional responsibilities.

From a social work perspective, occupational stress is not only a personalproblem but also an organizational and social issue. Workplace stress affects mental health, family relationships, professional functioning, and healthcare quality. Therefore, understanding occupational stress among nurses is important for developing supportive interventions and workplace policies.

Review of Literature

Das et al. (2018) conducted a cross-sectional study among 197 nurses at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital in Dhaka. The majority of respondents were female nurses aged between 21 and 39 years. The researchers used face-to-face interviews and the Expanded Nursing Stress Scale (ENSS). The study found that workload pressure, workplace demands, staffing limitations, and organizational factors contributed significantly to occupational stress among nurses.

Das et al. (2018) explored occupational stress and work ability among nurses working in an academic hospital in Bangladesh. The study found that occupational stress negatively affected nurses' work performance, productivity, and overall work ability. Nurses experiencing higher stress levels reported greater physical and psychological health problems.

Akter et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study among nurses in selected hospitals of Bangladesh. Through in-depth interviews, the researchers found that inadequate salary structures, staff shortages, excessive workload, and insufficient institutional support contributed substantially to occupational stress.

Mondal et al. (2024) examined workplace stress among healthcare professionals in Bangladesh. The findings indicated that workforce shortages, administrative pressure, and organizational limitations significantly affected healthcare workers' mental well-being.

Rahman et al. (2021) reported that nurses working in government hospitals frequently experienced occupational stress because of overcrowded wards, long duty hours, and inadequate staffing. Female nurses particularly reported workfamily conflict.

Jathanna et al. (2012) conducted a study among 339 nurses working in a superspecialty hospital in Kerala, India. Most respondents were female nurses younger than 30 years of age. The study found that excessive workload, emergency responsibilities, shift duties, supervisory conflict, and inadequate emotional preparation contributed significantly to occupational stress. Nurses commonly relied on prayer, social support, and positive coping strategies.

Nair (2016) conducted research among staff nurses in private hospitals and found that excessive responsibilities, demanding schedules, and patient-care burdens significantly increased occupational stress.

Veda and Roy (2020) reported that workload pressure, organizational culture, and workplace demands negatively influenced nurses' psychological wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Jiju and Singh (2022**)** found that emotional labour, continuous patient interaction, and workplace pressure contributed to emotional exhaustion among nursing professionals.

Sasikala and Ramu (2018) conducted research among 265 registered nurses in tertiary hospitals of Tamil Nadu, India. The study found that a substantial proportion of nurses experienced moderate to severe occupational stress because of workload, patientcare responsibilities, and workplace pressure.

Yuwanich et al. (2016) conducted a qualitative study among emergency department nurses in Bangkok, Thailand. The findings revealed that emergency situations, staff shortages, unpredictable work conditions, and inadequate workplace resources contributed substantially to occupational stress.

Wu et al. (2010) conducted a large-scale study among 2,613 female nurses in China. The researchers found that workload pressure, role conflict, organizational demands, and workplace environment significantly affected nurses' psychological well-being.

Shi et al. (2024) reported that occupational stress among nurses was strongly associated with effort–reward imbalance, emotional labour, workplace exposure risks, and organizational pressure. The study further emphasized the importance of institutional support in reducing occupational stress.

Sarafis et al. (2016) examined the impact of occupational stress on nurses' caring behaviours and quality of life. The findings demonstrated that occupational stress negatively influenced nurses' health-related quality of life and professional performance.

Research Gap

Although numerous studies have examined occupational stress among nurses, most research relies on quantitative survey methods. Qualitative case study-based investigations remain limited in Bangladesh. Furthermore, few studies explore occupational stress from a social work perspective focusing on nurses' lived experiences. Therefore, the present study seeks to understand occupational stress through a multiple case study approach.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore occupational stress among nurses working in selected hospital wards.
2. To identify major causes of occupational stress.
3. To examine the impact of occupational stress on nurses' personal and professional lives.
4. To understand coping mechanisms adopted by nurses.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative multiple case study. Five nurses from the Medicine, Pediatric, Cardiology, and Gynecology wards were selected as cases through purposive sampling. The case study approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of individual experiences and workplace realities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, informal discussions, and observational notes. Thematic analysis was utilized to analyze the data collected though case studies. Ethical considerations included confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, and voluntary participation.

Case Study 1

The first participant was a 34-year-old female nurse who had been working in the Medicine Ward of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for approximately ten years. She was married and had two children. She said the main reason for stress is too much workload. Many times, she has to take care of many patients in one shift.She has to do many things at the same time like giving medicines, checking patients, writing records, and handling emergency care.After that, she feels both physically and mentally very tired. She also said that changing shifts affects her sleep and family life. Night duty gives her less time with her children, so she feels family pressure. She often has headaches, tiredness and emotional stress. She added that sometimes the anxiety and frequent questions of family members of patients also increase her stress. She loves her job but she does agree that it disturbs the balance between work and family life. She feels happy when patients get better.

Case Study 2

The second participant was a 40-year-old female nurse working in the Medicine Ward with fifteen years of professional experience. She said too many patients in the ward increase work pressure because there is a lack of enough staffas compared to the large number of patients come to the hospital. She explained that patient care, writing reports and office work together makes her feel stressed. She reported chronic fatigue, lower back pain, and occasional sleep disturbances. Emotional involvement with critically ill patients sometimes affected her mental well-being. However, support from colleagues and professional commitment helped her continue her work effectively. The participant emphasized that hospital authorities should establish supportive supervision systems and provide stress management training to improve nurses' well-being.

Case Study 3

The third participant was a 38-year-old female nurse working in the Pediatric Ward for twelve years. She described pediatric nursing as emotionally demanding because it involved caring for critically ill children and interacting with distressed parents. According to the participant, witnessing the suffering of children frequently generated emotional distress. Parents often expected immediate improvements in their children's health conditions and placed inconsiderable pressure on healthcare staffs. Managing parents' concerns while providing clinical care created substantial emotional labour. The participant also reported that staff shortages increased workload and reduced opportunities for rest. Long duty hours affected her personal life and limited the time available for family activities. Emotional exhaustion was a common experience after managing critical pediatric cases. Despite these challenges, she believed that seeing children recover and return home healthy provided immense professional satisfaction. The participant suggested that counselling services and emotional support programs could help nurses cope up with occupational stress more effectively.

Case Study 4

The fourth participant was a 32-year-old female nurse employed in the Cardiology Ward. She has eight years of professional experience and worked primarily with critically ill cardiac patients. She told that "emergency situations happen very often in the cardiology ward, so nurses always need to stay alert. We have to monitor patients all the time and we are always afraid of making mistakes because even a small error can be life-threatening for the patients. "Handling emergency cases creates a lot of mental pressure on us", she added. She also stated, "Our workload is very intensive and there are not enough professionals which makes the stress worse." She often has to work extra hours, and after duty she cannot sleep properly. Shefelt very tired physically and also exhausted emotionally. She said, "still I am committed to my job

and I feel nursing is an important service to society. More nurses should be recruited and regular mental health support should be provided for health care workers."

Case Study 5

The fifth participant was a 36-year-old female nurse working in the Gynecology Ward for thirteen years. She described her job as very stressful because of heavy workload, emotional conflicts and communication problems. Many patients from lower socio-background cannot communicate properly, they feel shy to talk about gynaecological problems with health workers. Nurses in the gynaecology ward have to provide both medical care and emotional support to patients. She mentioned that it was also hard to manage job and family life together. Rotating shifts disturb her family routine and reduce time for social life. Because of this she often feels tired and emotionally exhausted. She added that support from co-workers helps her to handle stressful situation. She believes that counselling services and supportive hospital policiescan reducestress.

Findings

The analysis of the five case studies revealed six major themes-

Excessive Workload

All participants experienced excessive patient load and staffshortages as the primary causes of occupational stress. Nurses frequently reported handling for more patients than recommended, resulting in increased physical and mental strain.

Exhaustion

Participants described emotional fatigue resulting from patient suffering, critical illness, and frequent exposure to distressing situations. Pediatric and cardiology nurses particularly emphasized on emotional strain.

Disruption of Balance between Workand Family Life

Rotating shifts and long working hours disrupted family and social relationships and personal responsibilities. The nurses mentioned difficulties in balancing professional and family obligations.

Organizational Challenges

Inadequate staffing, administrative pressure, limited workplace resources, and insufficient professional recognition contributed significantly to occupational stress.

Physical Health Consequences

Participants described that headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, back pain, and reduced physical well-being are the common outcomes of workplace stress.

Coping Strategies

Family support, peer support, religious practices, and professional commitment were identified as important coping mechanisms as per the responses received from the nurses.

Discussions

The findings elaborate that occupational stress among nurses is influenced by organizational, professional, and emotional factors. Excessive workload emerged as the most significant occupational stressor across all case studies. This finding is consistent with previous studies conducted in Bangladesh and India, which identified staffing shortages and patient overload as major workplace challenges (Das et al., 2018; Jathanna et al., 2012).

The findings also highlight the importance of emotional labour in nursing practice. Nurses working in pediatric and cardiology wards reported substantial emotional exhaustion resulting from interactions with critically ill patients and distressed family members. Similar findings have been reported by Yuwanich et al. (2016) and Shi et al. (2024), who found emotional demands to be major predictors of occupational stress.

Work family conflict emerged as another important theme. Female nurses particularly experienced challenges balancing professional responsibilities and family obligations. This finding supports previous research indicating that shift work and long working hours negatively affect nurses' family relationships and psychological well-being.

From a social work perspective, occupational stress should be understood as both an individual and structural issue. Workplace stress affects personal well-being, family functioning, social relationships, and healthcare quality. Therefore, interventions should address organizational factors as well as individual coping mechanisms.

Recommendations

- Increase nurse-to-patient staffing ratios.
- Establish counseling and psychosocial support services for nurses.
- Introduce stress management and resilience-building programs.
- Improve workplace supervision and organizational support.
- Develop policies promoting work–life balance.
- Strengthen occupational health services in healthcare institutions.
- Provide regular professional recognition and incentives.
- Enhance opportunities for professional development and training.

Conclusion

Occupational stress remains a significant challenge among nurses working in tertiary healthcare institutions. The present study indicates that excessive workload, inadequate staffing, emotional labour, work–family conflict, and organizational limitations contribute substantially to workplace stress. The findings suggest that occupational stress negatively affects nurses' physical health, mental well-being, family relationships, and professional performance. Addressing occupational stress requires comprehensive interventions involving healthcare administrators, policymakers, and healthcare professionals. Improving workplace conditions and providing psychosocial support can contribute to enhanced nurse well-being and improved healthcare quality.

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Sustaining Peace through Inclusive Development in Conflict-Affected Manipur: Pathways to Sustainable Recovery in the Ongoing Kuki–Meitei Ethnic Conflict

Livingstone Gangmei[1]
Dr. Moses Kharbithai[2]

Abstract

Ethnic conflict continues to pose a major barrier to sustainable development in Northeast India. Since May 2023, the ongoing violence between the Meitei-Kuki communities has plunged Manipur into a severe humanitarian and socio-economic crisis. This study examines the socio-economic impacts of the conflict across five dimensions: internal-displacement, economic instability, educational disruption, strain on the healthcare system, and the erosion of social cohesion. More than 60000 people have been displaced, and food-insecurity and psychological-trauma are faced disproportionately by women and children.

By analyzing government, civil society and media sources, the paper demonstrates how the conflict has exacerbated inequalities and undermined Manipur's progress toward key Sustainable-Development Goals. Despite these challenges, the paper argues that long-term recovery is possible through community-driven resilience, inclusive governance, and conflict-sensitive development planning. The study proposes a shift from short-term relief to long-term socio-economic resilience, foregrounding peace and equity as mutually reinforcing pillars for rebuilding a fractured society.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development, Inclusive Growth, Ethnic Conflict, Displacement, Northeast India*

1. Introduction

In a region marked by the social polarization, political volatility, and deep-rooted ethnic division, effort to bring sustaining peace and inclusive development remains a core challenge. Manipur, exemplifies these challenges, which is an ethnically diverse state in Northeast India (Incredible India (n.d.). The valley dominant Meitei community and the hill dwelling tribal communities of Nagas and Kukis form the basic demographic of Manipur (PolSci Institute, 2024). Peaceful coexistence has been a defining feature of Manipur's cultural landscape (Kamei, 2019), however, sometimes, various periodic tensions have escalated into violence, which leaves an enduring impact on social harmony, slowing down the development trajectories of the state.

[1] Livingstone Gangmei, PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar

[2] Dr. Moses Kharbithai, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar.

The recent outbreak of Meitei–Kuki ethnic violence on 3 May 2023 represents a severe crisis in the state's modern history. Due to conflict, more than 60,000 individuals have been uprooted from their homes, forcing them to relief shelters in precarious humanitarian circumstances. A combination of factors led to the outbreak of conflict like the longstanding legal and political disputes around the land, development disparities between hill and valley, but initial trigger was due to direction given to state government by Manipur High Court on March 27 2023, to evaluate the demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for the Meitei community, which constitutes the majority population in the state (Baruah, 2023). All Tribal Students' Union of Manipur (ATSUM) organized a rally to protest on May 3, 2023 opposing the directive given by the High Court. During the demonstration, reports surfaced that the Anglo-Kuki War Memorial Gate had been set on fire, leading to immediate outbreaks of violence. In retaliation, Kuki groups reportedly burn down Meitei houses in Churachandpur, which in turn prompted counterattacks by Meitei groups in the Imphal Valley targeting Kuki settlements (Leivon, 2023). The ensuing clashes resulted in extensive destruction and casualties on both sides. Key sectors such as agriculture, fisheries, weaving, tourism, education and health have been heavily destabilized which undermine the socio-economic foundation upon which sustainable development depends.

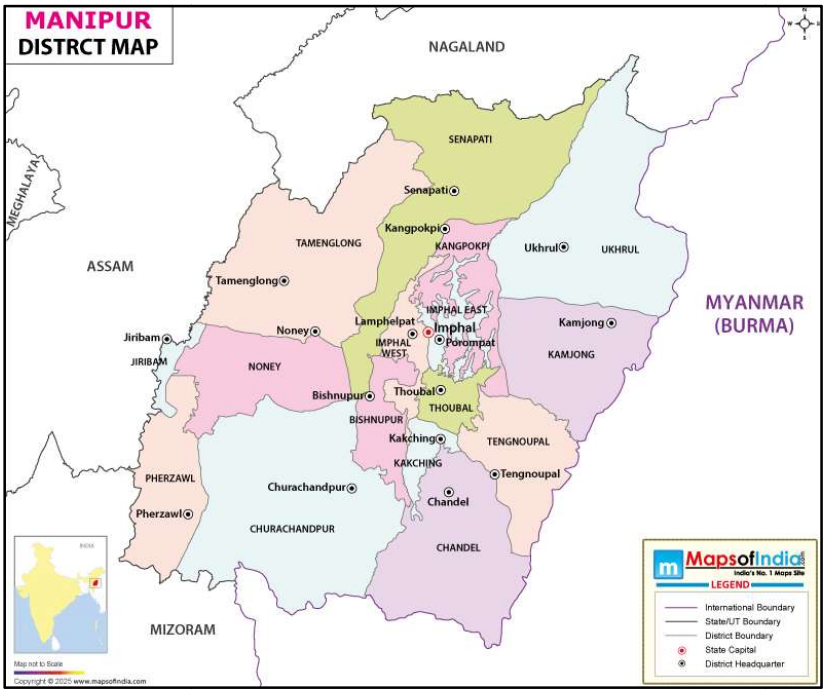


Figure 1: District map of Manipur.

(Source: From Manipur district map, by Maps of India)

Ethnic conflict has altered the developmental process of Manipur. It leads to disruption in community relations across ethnic-line, also destroying trust in public institutions which take years to construct, market breakdown, educational impact due

to interruption, internal immigration within the same state leading to reconfiguration in demographic patterns (Reuter, n.d.). For Manipur, the current conflict has significantly reduced its progress related to several Sustainable Development Goals, including poverty reduction, a good quality education, reduced inequalities and gender equality. Vulnerable groups such as the women, children, and elderly people bear the disproportionate burdens of food insecurity, trauma and exploitation during any kind of conflict (Tamashiro, 2010).

At the core of Manipur's crisis remains an underlying systematic issue, which is an absence of a mechanism for inclusive governance. Various issue, like an unequal access to resource, perception of political favoritism by each groups, imbalances in land rights of the communities, and identity based mobilization, these are the underlying drivers of inter-group mistrust, which the state often failed to address leading to recurrence of multiple ethnic clashes in Manipur over the past decades, namely, the Naga–Kuki conflict (1992–97), Zomi–Kuki tensions (1997–98), and Meitei–Pangal conflict (1993). Peace remains fragile in the absence of dialogue platforms that represent all communities, and development initiatives frequently falter when they do not incorporate the lived realities of conflict-affected populations (Das, Kamei, & Gangmei, 2024).

The present ongoing conflict highlights a mechanism for reconstructing a more inclusive society, as local communities along with church organization and youth, women groups alongside community indigenous institutions emerged across relief camps to provide humanitarian support (Mohan et al., 2023). The capacity of people to mobilize collective action to recover from crises illustrate the community resilience power. It is therefore critical to enhance such mechanisms along with the promotion of participatory governance for rebuilding trust and social cohesion.

Considering the prevailing circumstance which I have laid forward, this paper explores the socio-economic impact of the ongoing conflict between Kuki-Meitei community in Manipur, while in the process, trying to identify a concrete pathway toward a sustainable recovery. Various secondary data are evaluated in order to ascertain whether it exacerbated or mitigated the conflict's consequences. The study aims to lay out a new partway for policy design that prioritizes equity and empowerment by integrating the prism of resilience, and sustainable development. The paper argues that through isolated interventions, it is not possible to achieve a sustainable peace in Manipur. For a better future of Manipur, peace, quality and sustainability must be treated as a reinforcing pillar where its feature of ethnic diversity becomes a strength rather than fault line.

2. Scope of the Paper and Methodology

2.1 Scope of the Paper

This paper examines the ongoing Meitei–Kuki conflict in Manipur through a socio-economic and peacebuilding lens, situating it within wider debates on sustainable

development and inclusive governance in Northeast India. The study timeframe focuses from 3 May 2023 to the present, though relevant earlier cycles of ethnic conflicts were analysed. In terms of geographical area, the study covers the state of Manipur, with attention to displacement flows from both hill and valley districts. Five interrelated dimensions of the crisis are assessed in the paper, they are: internal displacement; disruption of education; collapse of livelihoods; psychosocial consequences; and healthcare system. The paper goes beyond assessing these impacts as it identifies pathways for sustainable recovery grounded in conflict-sensitive governance, livelihood restoration and equitable development.

2.2 Methodology

A qualitative research design is adopted in the studies, based on analysis of secondary sources. As the study area is in an active-conflict zone, causing constraints to practically conduct a fieldwork in the affected areas, therefore, it was determined that the most appropriate approach for producing a comprehensive and balanced account of the crisis was a secondary source. For the study objective, secondary sources are particularly well suited, since the range of sectors affected, scale of the displacement, and multi-district geography of the conflict are best captured through the aggregated documentation produced by government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and the press, triangulated against peer-review academic papers. Various government reports, International organization reports on manipur violence, academic peer-reviewed literature, and major international and national major newspapers form the secondary sources for the study. Claims which were contested were triangulated across at least two source categories before being acknowledged, and to avoid partisan interpretation and ensure balanced representation of both affected communities, a conflict-sensitive analytical lens was maintained throughout the study.

2.3 Limitations

Limitations should be acknowledged in the study. The study relies on secondary data as fieldwork in affected areas was unsafe during the period of the conflict, therefore the analyst cannot capture the full texture of lived experience that first-hand interviews would have provided. Internet shutdowns and bias reporting made independent verification of some claim difficult, and as the conflict is ongoing and conditions continue to evolve, the findings reflect the situation as of the data-collection period and should be updated as subsequent developments, including any peace-process outcomes.

3. Contextual Background

3.1 Ethnic Identity and Social Diversity in Manipur

The Manipur community is shaped by ethnic assemblage, whose identities are rooted in differentiated historical development, languages, cultural practices, and territorial affiliations. The Meitei community along with Meitei Pangal with a population of

about 54% predominantly settled in Imphal Valley (Karmakar, 2023) , which constitutes the largest ethnic groups in the state, also holding a central position in the socio-political landscape of the state. Meanwhile, the tribal population, which includes Kukis and Nagas, comprise a population of about 36 % (Shankar IAS Parliament, 2023), inhabit hill districts, these communities are organized into clan and village based institutions with powerful indigenous governance structures.

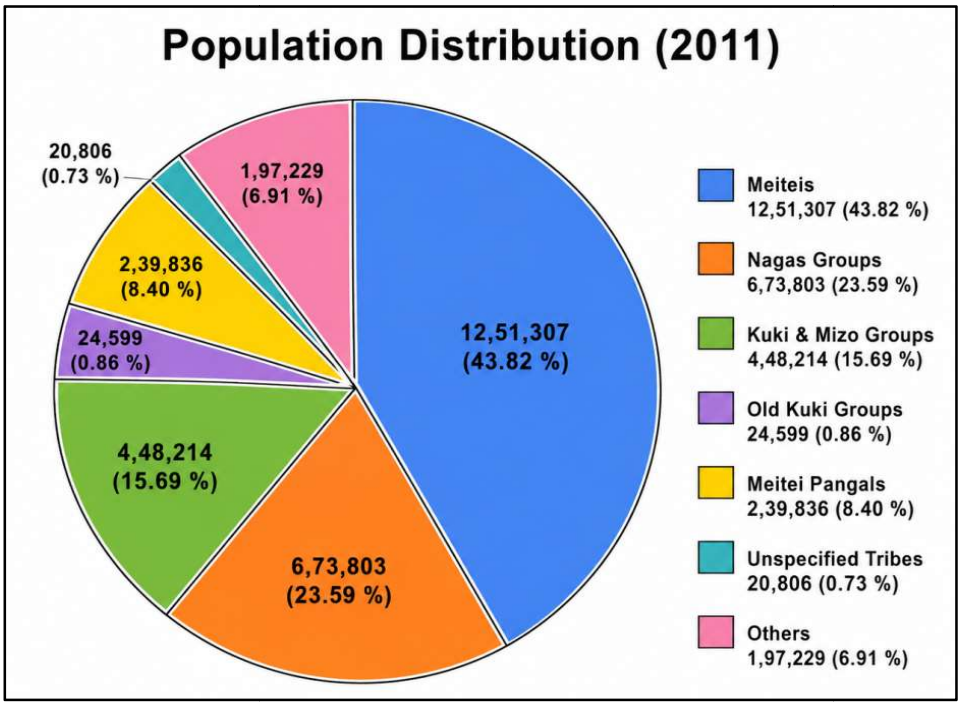


Figure 2: Population distribution of major communities in Manipur according to the 2011 Census of India.

(Source: Compiled from data published in The Sangai Express)

In a state like Manipur, ethnic identity is beyond cultural ethos, it is deeply intertwined with land, territory, and political representation. The valley and hills are divided as it has a different land administration system, the valley lands are open to be purchased by all, while in hill areas, there are constitutional protections which restrict land ownership in hills only to tribal communities (Bobichand, 2022). This arrangement has historically reinforced the perceptions of threat, demographic imbalance, and territorial insecurity, which were the factors that influenced inter-communities relations for decades. Therefore, the ethnicity in Manipur functions primarily as a cultural maker and political resource. The ongoing competing narratives of historical settlement, cultural legitimacy and indigeneity continue to shape the process of group mobilization, which often form the basis for demands related to autonomous administration, education opportunities, land protection, and recognition within India's constitutional framework.

3.2 Historical Roots of Ethnic Tensions

Ethnic conflict in Manipur is not a recent phenomenon. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, several episodic violence mark the inter-community hostilities nature, the early 1990s Naga-Kuki conflict which resulted in mass displacement of people, hundreds of villages uprooted, and the large scale killings of the innocents on both side (Haokip, 2013), has left deep scars on inter ethnic relations in Manipur. Similarly, the Meitei-Pangal conflict of 1993 (Syed, 2023), the Kuki-Peite ethnic conflict of 1997-98 (Khan, 2006) along with other recurring clashes between various tribal communities have reinforced the long standing divisions among the three ethnic groups of Naga-Kuki-Meitei.

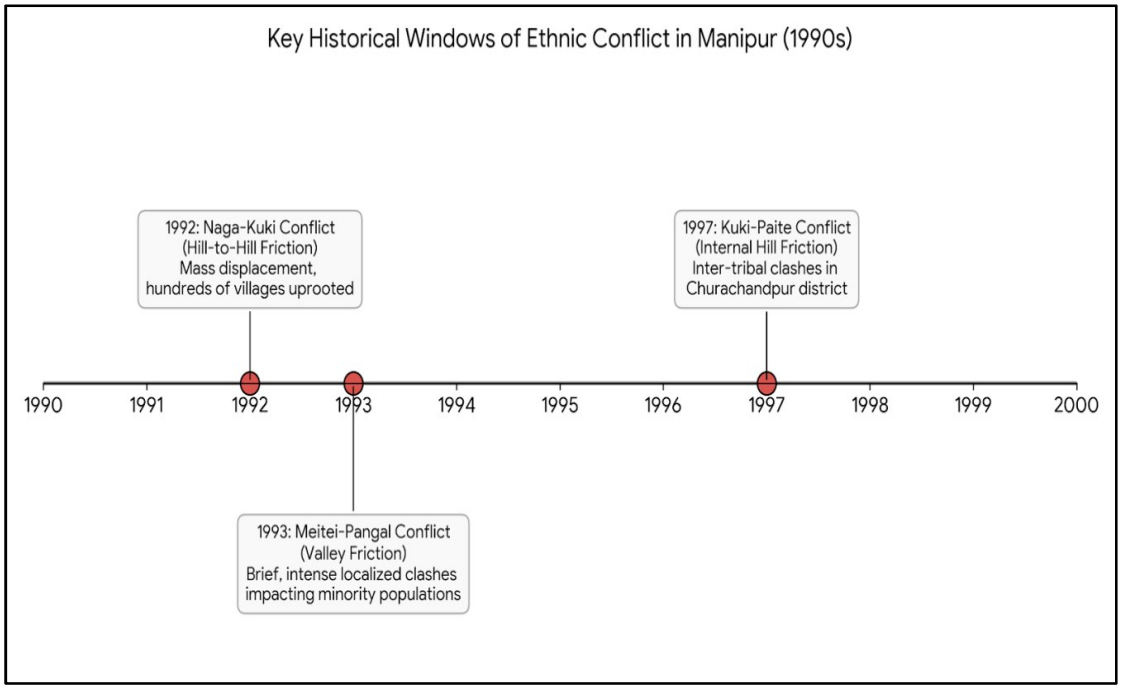


Figure 3: Timeline of Major Inter-Community Hostilities in Manipur

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources.

When closely observed, these conflicts often share an underlying common pattern, they are:

3.2.1. Contested territorial claims as Manipur is marked by boundaries which were created during colonial era, the government often ignored the sentiments of the locals, even after post independence, leading to competing assertions by each ethnic group over historical homeland, jurisdiction, and district boundaries frequently bringing them into confrontation.

3.2.2. Identity-Based Political Mobilization

Manipur demographics profile dictates various organizations representing different ethnic groups choosing a method of mobilization around which demands for greater autonomy or constitutional status, leading to heightening tensions.

3.2.3. Resource Distribution and Perceived Inequalities

Manipur's physical landscape is defined by a central flat valley surrounded by a vast expanse of rugged hills and mountains. Based on its topographical features, the state is divided between the 10 hill districts and 6 valley districts (Roy, 2016). The development disparities that exist between the valley and hill districts (Haokip & Reimeingam, 2021), along with the limited economic opportunities in the state, have exacerbated the mistrust among the people.

3.2.4. State Policies and Administrative Structures

The hills-valley divide in Manipur goes beyond a mere geographical distinction; it is marked by a historically constructed socio-political fault line (Suan, 2006) that has influenced contemporary ethnic relations and the governance structure. Kipgen (2026) put forward an argument that the colonial arrangement, carried into the postcolonial period through limited and ineffective mechanisms of autonomy for the hill people, continues to shape ethnic contestation over land rights and access to state benefits, leading to recurring conflict in Manipur.

As a result, in Manipur, ethnic identities remain deeply politicized by the factors mentioned above, and even a small trigger can rapidly escalate into full-scale violence.

4 Structural Drivers of the 2023 Meitei–Kuki Conflict

The Meitei-Kuki conflict of 2023 immediate triggered for rapid escalation was a dispute over the demand by Meitei communities for Scheduled Tribe status (PTI, 2024), and the Manipur High Court’s directive to the state government to expedite its consideration on the Meitei demands for inclusion into ST lists (Lakshman, 2023), although the deeper causes include a structural inequality and institution shortcomings span over decades.

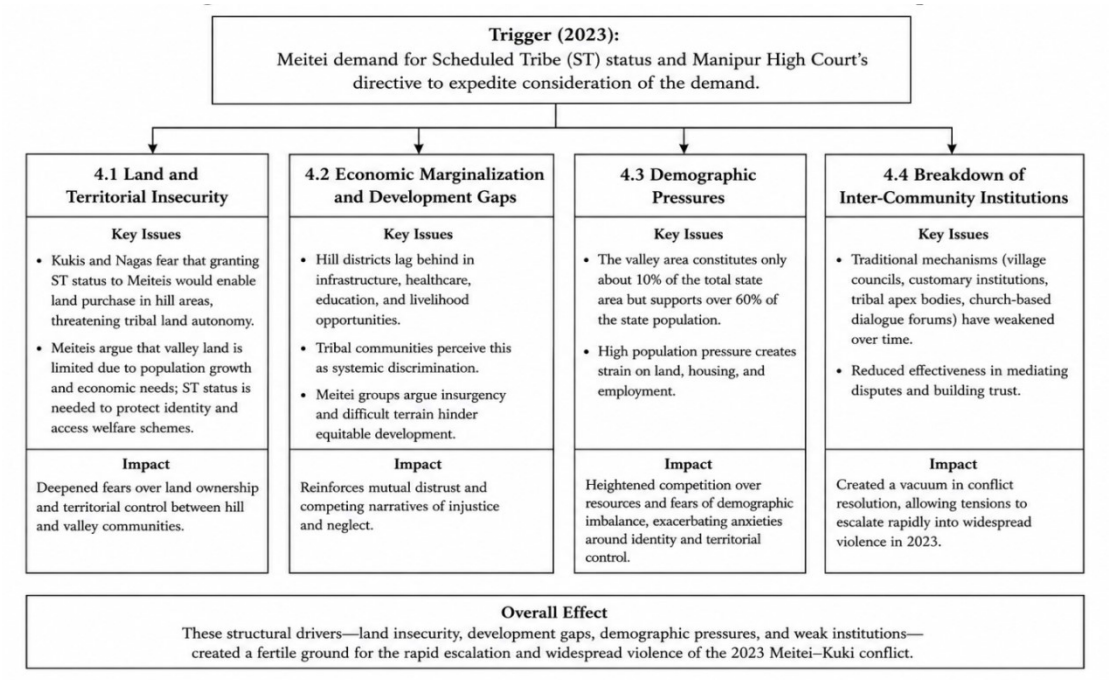


Figure 4: Structural Drivers of the 2023 Meitei–Kuki Conflict in Manipur

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources.

Key structural drivers include:

4.1 Land and Territorial Insecurity

The Manipur hill-valley land divide is positioned in the middle of the inter-community tensions. Kukis and Nagas groups are alarmed by the possibility of granting ST status to the Meiteis, which in turn would enable Meitei to purchase land in the hill district, leading to potential threat of tribal land autonomy. Conversely, the concerned of Meitei include the limited lands, various Meitei organizations argue that valley lands are limited in order to support the constant rapid population growth and economic expansion, and that the ST status is needed to address the concerned of limited land and in protecting the distinct identity (Kipgen & Kipgen, 2023) along with access to various central welfare schemes.

4.2 Economic Marginalization and Development Gaps

Comparatively, the hill districts lack far behind the valley districts in matters related to infrastructure, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities (Thangjahao Haokip & Reimeingam, 2024). This unequal development is perceived by tribal communities as a form of systemic discrimination, while Meitei groups put forward an argument that the activities of insurgency coupled with difficult terrain hinder equitable development. These ongoing opposing narratives continue to fuel frustration and distrust between the hill and valley people.

4.3 Demographic Pressures

Another key issue is included in Manipur geography with the continuing demographic pressure on the valley districts. Although, valley constitutes only 10% of the total state area, it supports over 60% of the state population (Pautunthang, 2024). This huge demographic pressure creates an intense pressure on land, housing, and employment prospects of the valley, leading to perceptions of this demographic imbalance which exacerbate anxieties around identity and territorial control.

4.4 Breakdown of Inter-Community Institutions

Inter-community engagements were often led by traditional mechanisms such as village councils, customary institutions, tribal apex council or body, and also church based dialogue forums. These traditional institutions serve as a mechanism that mediates disputes whenever inter-community conflict takes place, but it has weakened over time, leaving a vacuum in the area of conflict resolution processes. All the above factors together created a fertile ground for rapid widespread of violence once the immediate political trigger emerged in 2023.

4.5 Escalation of the 2023 Violence

On May 3, the violence began when the All Tribal Students' Union Manipur (ATSUM), held a solidarity march in all hill districts with the purpose of protesting the recent Manipur High Court directives, which had asked the state government to send a recommendation to the centre related to the demands of Meitei community to be included in the Scheduled Tribes (STs) list (Sadokpam, 2023). Miscommunication, rumors, and isolated incidents of arson spiraled quickly leading into coordinated attacks on opposing communities, retaliations, and mass displacement within the state. Violence rapidly spread across multiple districts, leading to forced migration of more than 60,000 people from their homes, looting of police armouries, along with hundreds of churches and a dozen temples destroyed (Baker, 2023).

Therefore, multiple root cause such as the continuous development disparity between the hill and valley districts, perceived land insecurity among the people, mistrust between the three major ethnic groups (Naga-Meitei-Kuki), continue trust deficits in the state governance, and deep trauma across communities continue to serve as hindrances in the path of progress toward inclusive development. Accordingly, comprehending these contextual factors is critically essential in designing conflict-sensitive and sustainable recovery strategies that lead to move from short-term relief toward long-term resilience.

5. Socio-Economic Impact of the Conflict

5.1 Internal Displacement and Humanitarian Conditions

In the recent history of Manipur, the Kuki-Meitei ethnic conflict resulted in one of the largest internal displacement crises. More than 59,000 individuals have been forced to leave their homes (PTI, 2024) after many villages were burned, attacked, or rendered

unsafe. Many families, those who fled, were left to make the journey with minimal belongings and sought shelter in the makeshift camps established in school buildings, community halls, churches, and other various temporary structures (Rao, 2023). Conditions of living in these relief camps are highly challenging, as the camps are made promptly for providing immediate shelter, it is characterized by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and poor access to clean water (Amnesty International Australia, 2024). Food supplies are not stable, and irregular nutritional intake has worsened the vulnerability of people in the camps, which include children, pregnant women, elderly persons, and people with disabilities (Sphere India, 2025). Many families in the camp face uncertainty about returning to their home due to long term displacement, which lead to heavy psychological stress and a growing sense of impermanence.

5.2 Economic Disruption and Livelihood Loss

The ethnic conflict has caused an overwhelming impact on the economy, deeply affecting agriculture, causing disruption to small-scale industries, trade, and tourism. Agriculture, which has already been limited due to topography challenge and recurrent flooding issue, has been now disrupted more by continued violence that prevents farmers from accessing their fields (Asian News International, 2023). Many paddy fields remain fallow and uncultivated, the affected family livestock has been lost or abandoned, and fisheries that supported thousands of livelihoods have been disrupted.

Along with these, the destruction of granaries, agricultural tools, and stored crops have further exacerbated agricultural losses. Handloom weaving, which is an essential source of income particularly for thousands of women, has suffered significant disruptions. Many artisans displaced from their home have lost access to essential looms and materials (Ghosal, 2023), cooperatives have also been halted, and markets that once supported the flourishing sale of traditional textiles have collapsed due to conflict. Tourism in the state, which had gradually become one of the promising sectors, has completely collapsed due to travel restrictions and public fear (Mukherjee, 2024), leaving many of the dependent workers without an option for stable income.

5.3 Educational Disruption and Learning Challenges

The education sector has been profoundly disturbed by the conflict, affecting large numbers of students across both the hill and valley districts. As the conflict continues over long periods, many schools have been converted into relief camps, leading to disruption of regular classroom teaching for a prolonged period (Singh & Okram, 2025). Even after the schools were reopened, classroom attendance remained inconsistent due to parents' concerns for the students safety, another major issue included lack of proper transportation system for the affected children, and also the psychological impact of violence on conflict affected children (Sharma, 2023). Children who are displaced and forced to live in shelter camps struggle with overcrowded environments that hinder their concentration and the camps fail to

provide the children with a quiet space to study (Premchandra, 2025). These disruptions due to conflict have widened the present learning gaps, leading to increased dropout risks, and threatened the long-term human capital of affected communities in the conflict. The damage done to the educational sector poses a serious threat to the future skills and opportunities of the young generation in Manipur (Sinam & Singh, 2025).

5.4 Health System Strain and Healthcare Accessibility

The Kuki-Meitei ethnic conflict has led to a staggering pressure on the already stretched healthcare system of Manipur. Due to the conflict, many of the health centers remained closed or was completely rendered dysfunctional in the affected areas because of the various damage caused by conflict, and also the problem of staff shortages due to large scale displacement of people from the medical care provider background, and the continued blockade of movement of person belonging to either communities across ethnic boundaries (Safeguarding Health in Conflict Coalition, 2024). Many of the displaced families failed to receive proper access to essential healthcare services which include things like the medical care given to pregnant women, immunization of the babies, many of the chronic disease management, and also emergency treatment. Pregnant women and infants have consistently faced elevated risks because of inadequate access in basic nutritions, lack of proper antenatal monitoring system, and also severe lack of appropriate sanitation in relief camps (De, 2025).

5.5 Social Fragmentation and Loss of Social Cohesion

Among the most major consequences of the conflict include the decline of social trust and cohesion across the communities of Manipur. Previously, many of the localities had vibrant mixed communities living together, but now it has been segregated into one homogeneous zone based on ethnic identities, with families relocating to areas where they feel more safety among their own communities (Pandya, 2025). This separation has led to reduction in interaction between the Kuki and Meitei communities; earlier interactions were taking place in workplaces, markets, and public places, thereby causing more mistrust and suspicion. The inter-community contact decline has therefore brought forth the perceptions of hostility and fear among the communities, which contribute to a sense of “us” versus “them” (Hussain, 2025). The conflict has caused many to lose friendships across ethnic lines, children and youth have been particularly affected by the continuing conflict, and it forced them to grow up in an environment shaped by division and trauma. The loss of social cohesion will have a long term serious implications for the effort of reconciliation and peacebuilding across the communities, making it difficult to rebuild relationships that have been disrupted by violence and displacement.

6. Community-Based Resilience and Local Coping Mechanisms

6.1 Emergence of Community Solidarity During Crisis

Despite the large-scale destruction and internal migration caused by the conflict, people from the three (Naga-Kuki-Meitei) communities across Manpur demonstrated a remarkable resilience. Many ordinary citizens mobilized among themselves rapidly to support those who are in need when the state institutions struggled and failed to respond effectively. This impulsive and natural solidarity emerged across both the hill and valley regions, which revealed the unbroken strength of shared cultural convention, extended family relatives and traditional support systems run by various traditional institutions. Community members from both the warring sides, sometimes at great personal risk, work hard to help evacuate affected families, take in the displaced people for shelter, and organize collective protection efforts.

6.2 Functioning of Mutual Aid Networks and Volunteer Groups

An important central role in sustaining the displaced population in the early months of violence is the mutual local aided networks systems. Evacuation routes for the affected peoples are being coordinated by youth groups, student unions, village volunteers, and neighborhood committees, this coordination facilitated other essential help like an essential medical transport, and they also assisted older individuals unable to flee independently without any assistance. Many of these groups work to manage the critical logistical support within the relief camps by organizing the distribution of food, water, clothing, blankets, and sanitary products. Volunteers have traveled across dangerous zones in order to procure essential supplies, bridging critical gaps created by disruption of supply chains.

6.3 Indigenous Institutions and Traditional Authority Structures

Tribal village councils and customary courts, which are an important indigenous governance structure in the state, played a role in the process of maintaining order and unity within the affected communities. These indigenous institutions help in coordinating collective responses from the communities. Its role included mediating disputes among the displaced people within the relief camps, and provided guidance during moments of fear and uncertainty whenever it required from them. These institutions enforced the community established customary rule, it worked to reduce internal tensions when dispute arises, and also organized labor sharing systems for tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and site maintenance, they can maintain these orders due to the high cultural authority they command among the community.

6.4 Adaptation and Reinvention of Livelihood Strategies

The destruction of livelihoods caused by the ethnic conflict has forced the affected families to adopt an alternative form of economic resilience compared to the kind which they follow during the normal peaceful time. Some of the displaced individuals began engaging in small scale income generating activities within the shelters camps itself, these activities include the selling of cooked food, tailoring of cloths, food processing and handloom weaving on improvised loom by the women. Youth

members are forced to engage in temporary construction work, local transport, or as agricultural labour in areas deemed safe. Women in the relief shelter camps revised weaving and handicraft production by using mostly threads and loom which were donated by public, generating an income to support their families through local markets, along with online platform as the social media booms has led to new customers for these weaving and handicraft products from the camps.

6.5 Community-Led Security Measures and Protection Mechanisms

Many times, the state security responses were not provided at the required time, leading to perceived failures of the state security apparatus, therefore, many localities formed various volunteer groups in order to safeguard their own neighborhoods and homes (PTI, 2024). These volunteer protection groups took up the responsibility of monitoring movements of people, set up checkpoints, and also coordinated night patrols to prevent further attacks. While the formation of such groups does reflect the resilience of communities in Manipur, however, it also underscores the deep mistrust in the formal state security mechanisms. In some areas, these protection groups worked along with village elders and youth leaders to maintain discipline in the village, and prevent the escalation of violence (John, 2023). The presence of volunteer groups contributed to a sense of safety among the affected community during the conflict, although indicated the state precarious security environment which the communities must continue to navigate

7. Pathways to Sustainable Recovery and Inclusive Development

7.1 Rebuilding Governance and Restoring Institutional Trust

A sustainable recovery in Manipur cannot begin without mitigating the crisis of public confidence deficit. The ongoing conflict exposed the governance weakness, failure to provide help, and it is perceived as bias in security deployment, inconsistent communication, and inadequate relief coordination for the displaced people. For the restoration of public trust in state institutions, it requires major institutional reforms that enhance transparency, more accountability, and promote participation. During the conflict, governance must be conflict sensitive in the state administrative practice, ensuring that the state institutions operate without any partiality and respond effectively to early warning signs of violence. Local governance institutions like village councils, panchayats, municipal bodies, and other tribal authorities must be involved in the rehabilitation efforts in order to reflect community needs and expectations.

An important dimension of institutional reform concerns the constitutional framework governing the hill areas of Manipur. At present, through the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) constituted under Article 371C of the Indian Constitution and the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Councils Act, 1971, the Manipur hill districts are administered (Riamei, 2017). The objective of these mechanisms were to protect tribal land and safeguard distinctiveness in cultural practices of hill communities, but the power of those District councils are significantly weaker than those available to autonomous

councils established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which currently applies to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram (James, 2024). Sixth Schedule councils possess legislative, executive, and judicial powers over land, forests, customary law, and local administration (Pathak, 2016), whereas the District Councils in Manipur's hill districts operate largely in an advisory capacity with limited financial and legislative autonomy. Since the conflict began between the Kuki and Meitei back in 2023, the Kuki group has been demanding separate administration concerning all the Kuki settlement areas in Manipur (PTI, 2026). It is of the opinion by the majority of Kuki that the violence was pre-meditated and planned conspiracy against their community, though the earlier outburst appears to be from the demand of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status by Meitei community, unlike the previous conflict, this conflict has divided deeply across ethnic line related to state administration, police, judiciary and bureaucracy. (Chongloi, 2023).

A fundamental challenge to inclusive peace includes the demand for separate administration. The demand is rooted in the trauma of 2023 violence, any territorial bifurcation risks institutionalizing ethnic boundaries rather than transcending them. The demand itself must be seen as a symptom of governance failure. Rather than separate administration demands, a more meaningful constitutional accommodation, such as strengthened autonomous council arrangements under the Sixth Schedule. A peace process that addresses substantive concerns like equitable resource allocation, security guarantees, and cultural recognition, while preserving the territorial integrity of Manipur and fostering inter-community dialogue, is more likely to produce a durable and inclusive settlement.

7.2 Revitalizing Livelihoods and Reconstructing the Local Economy

People's livelihoods have been decimated due to the conflict, many key sectors such as agriculture, handloom weaving, fisheries, and tourism were hardest to be impacted, it is essential that the path to economic recovery must address these issues. For restoring the economic life of the people, a multi-dimensional strategy should be adopted that focuses on agricultural infrastructure rebuilding, access to farmland should also be restored by the state to the farmer, and providing incentives like by supplying farmers with seeds, tools and credit to resume cultivation. The handloom sector required a targeted support in order to push start to replace destroyed looms, raw materials, and cooperative networks. Sustainable economic reconstruction must be diversified in terms of economic opportunities to reduce vulnerability to future undetermined shocks. By building inclusive economic pathways that emphasize the upliftment of marginalized groups, Manipur can begin the journey to rebuild a resilient post-conflict economy.

7.3 Rebuilding Education Systems for Long-Term Human Development

In matters related to development, education remains a key part to sustainable recovery, as the current ethnic conflict threatens the human capital of an entire generation. In the state, many schools continue to function as relief camps, with many thousands of children having been forced to leave school, they have experienced

emotional trauma, and loss of essential school materials. Ensuring safe learning environments for the students are required in the education system for rehabilitation. To reduce dropout rates, the state government can initiate educational support like targeted scholarships for the displaced students. In the long run, it is imperative to strengthen school infrastructure, digital learning tools, and bring forth inclusive education policies to create a more resilient education system which is capable of withstanding future crises.

7.4 Strengthening Healthcare and Building Community Well-Being

Due to conflict, the healthcare system in Manipur has been impacted severely, needing significant systemic improvement. Immediately it can begin by rebuilding damaged health facilities, ensuring safe return of medical staff, and services like immunization, maternal health, and chronic disease management. In the long run, health system rehabilitation should focus more on building resilient infrastructure, work to improve better supply chains, and expanding healthcare workforce capacity, in order to ensure that in future, such crises do not lead to severe discruptions.

7.5 Restoring Social Cohesion and Rebuilding Inter-Community Relationships

Due to the conflict, ethnic segregation has occurred at an unprecedented level, leading to deterioration of decades of peaceful coexistence. For restoring those social cohesion that the state once enjoyed, deliberate and culturally sensitive peacebuilding efforts are necessary. A platform must be created where a shared dialogue between the representatives of Meitei, Naga, Kuki, and Pangal can be facilitated safely. Various initiatives like that of Peace committees, led by respected community leaders, such initiatives can help rebuild communication channels, and address misinformation, along with discussion on shared concerns. While rebuilding social cohesion, it requires patience and long-term commitment, as severe trauma and mistrust cannot be resolved quickly. Yet peace cannot be sustained without deliberate efforts to restore the social fabric that once held Manipur together.

8 Conclusion

The 2023 Meitei–Kuki conflict in Manipur represents a profound rupture in the state's socio-economic and institutional fabric, producing widespread displacement, livelihood loss, educational disruption, and deep social fragmentation. Beyond its immediate humanitarian consequences, the crisis exposes long-standing structural inequalities, governance deficits, and unresolved disputes over land, identity, and political representation. The analysis demonstrates that conflict and under development are mutually reinforcing: violence disrupts development processes, while persistent inequalities heighten the risk of renewed conflict. At the same time, community responses like mutual aid networks, indigenous institutions, and adaptive livelihood strategies highlight the critical role of local resilience in sustaining affected populations.

However, community resilience alone is insufficient for long-term recovery. Sustainable peace in Manipur requires a multidimensional strategy that integrates conflict-sensitive governance, equitable economic reconstruction, restoration of education and healthcare systems, and deliberate efforts to rebuild inter-community trust. Development interventions must move beyond short-term relief toward inclusive, participatory, and justice-oriented frameworks. Ultimately, the future stability of Manipur depends on recognizing peace and development as interdependent processes. A durable recovery can only emerge through institutional reform, social reconciliation, and policies that address the structural roots of conflict while promoting equity and inclusion across all communities.

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Role of India in Conflict Resolution in the Strait of Hormuz and Building peace

Ranjan Debnath[1]
Bikranta Paul [2]

Abstract

The ongoing Iran- Israel conflict and the resulting tension in the Strait of Hormuz have emerged as one of the most significant geopolitical challenges of the 21st century. As one of the world's most important Maritime chokepoint, the Strait of Hormuz playa a crucial role in global energy security, international trade and regional stability. This article examines the crisis through perspective of peace studies, humanitarian social work and international relation. It analyses how rising tensions in the region have generated humanitarian consequences such as displacement, migration, insecurity, psychological trauma, inflation, economic instability and disruptions to global supply chains. The study highlights the importance of humanitarian rehabilitation, social work interventions and long term peacebuilding in addressing the social and human cost of conflict. Particular attention is given to India's strategic interests in West Asia, including energy security, Maritime stability and the protection of Indian diaspora. The article further explores India's balanced diplomatic approach, emphasizing dialogue, de-escalation, humanitarian concern and strategic autonomy. It argues that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through military means alone but requires Cooperation, rehabilitation, justice and inclusive peacebuilding efforts. The study concludes that India can play a constructive role as a responsible regional actor by promoting diplomacy, humanitarian values and peaceful conflict resolution in an increasing complex geopolitical environment.

Keywords: *Strait of Hormuz, Iran – Israel Conflict, Humanitarian social Work, Peace Building, Conflict Resolution.*

Introduction

Several geopolitical conflicts that have affected regional security, global peace, humanitarian stability and economic systems have emerged in the twenty-first century. In the present globalised world wars and political tensions are no longer confined in the boundaries of the nation. Instead, they shape international trade, migration, energy security, humanitarian conditions and diplomatic relations across continents. Tensions over the Strait of Hormuz have been one of the biggest geopolitical crises in recent years amid rising hostilities between Iran and Israel. The Strait of Hormuz is one of the world's most strategically important waterways as a

[1] Ranjan Debnath, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar - Email – rd4711716@gmail.com

[2] Bikranta Paul, Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Assam University, Silchar - Email- 0000bikranta@gmail.com

sizeable share of global oil and gas exports transits through route, and it is also a regional maritime route. The conflict between Iran and Israel raised fears of a naval confrontation, attacks on commercial vessels, economic sanctions and a possible disruption of global oil supplies. These developments had dire humanitarian consequences, such as economic instability, displacement, inflation, unemployment, disruption of food and medical supply chains, and psychological insecurity among civilian populations. The crisis hit particularly hard at developing countries that relied on imported energy resources. Of these countries, India holds a very important place because of its strategic dependence on Gulf energy resources and strong economic and diplomatic relations with West Asian countries. India's response to the crisis was a mix of humanitarian concern, diplomatic balancing and strategic realism. India instead took an aggressive position, stressing peaceful dialogue, regional cooperation, maritime security and de-escalation of tensions. India also tried to protect the interests of its citizens working in the Gulf countries and to ensure the stability of international trade routes.

This Article examines the strait of Hormuz crisis from the perspective of peace, conflict and humanitarian social work. The article analyses the humanitarian implications of the crisis, the role of humanitarian rehabilitation and peacebuilding and India's diplomatic initiatives in promoting regional stability. It further argues that sustainable peace in conflict regions requires not only political negotiation but also humanitarian justice, social rehabilitation and long term peacebuilding strategies. As Mahatma Gandhi once famously stated, *"There is no path to peace; peace is the path."* This statement remains highly relevant in understanding the present geopolitical conflicts because military confrontation often deepens human suffering, whereas peacebuilding and dialogue create the foundation for sustainable coexistence.

Objectives of the study:

- To analyse the strategic and geopolitical importance of the strait of Hormuz in current international relations, especially in the framework of Iran -Israel conflict and its implications for global energy security and Maritime stability.
- To examine the humanitarian consequences of the Iran Israel conflict, including displacement, insecurity of migration, psychological trauma, economic instability, inflation and disruptions to global supply chains.
- Examine the role of humanitarian social work and peace building in conflict affected areas, including rehabilitation, community building, human security and post conflict recovery.
- To evaluate India's strategic interest and diplomatic reaction to the strait of Hormuz crisis, with emphasis on energy security, Maritime cooperation, protection of the Indian diaspora and regional stability.
- To evaluate India's potential role as a peacebuilding actor in West Asia, highlighting its commitment to strategic autonomy, diplomatic dialogue, humanitarian cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution.

Historical and Strategic Importance of the Strait of Hormuz

This Strait of Hormuz is located between Iran and Oman and it connects the Persian gulf to the Arabian Sea. Although it is geographically small, it's strategic significance is enormous. THE Strait acts as the principal maritime route through which oil exports from Gulf Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and UAE and transported to international markets. According to the international Energy Agency, nearly 20% of the world's Total petroleum consumption passes through the Strait every Day. The world economy depends heavily on uninterrupted supplies of energy. Petroleum resources are deeply embedded in the processes of industrial production, transportation, aviation, electricity, agriculture and international trade. Any threat to the Strait therefore immediately creates uncertainty on global markets and raises fears of economic instability. The Strait has historically been a focal point of geopolitical competition due to its strategic location. Regional rivalries, ideological conflicts, foreign interventions and power struggles among global actors have repeatedly turned the region into a zone of instability. The recent tensions between Iran and Israel, both major regional powers with wider global alliances, further added to this anxiety. The Crisis shows how maritime routes can become instruments of political pressure and strategic influence. Threats of disrupting the strait generated panic in global energy markets because even temporary interruptions could sharply increase oil prices and destabilize vulnerable economies.

According to political thinker Alfred Thayer Mahan, sea power was essential to the determination of global influence. Mahan thought that to be economically and politically dominant, you had to control strategic maritime routes. The Strait of Hormuz crisis is a potent example of this geopolitical reality, as the control of maritime chokepoints directly affects global trade and international power dynamics. But today, maritime security is more than military strategy. Today maritime stability is also closely linked to humanitarian wellbeing. Safe and secure sea lanes are essential for the movement of food supplies, medical aid, humanitarian assistance and commercial goods. So when the Strait is disturbed, it doesn't only impact governments and corporations, but also everyday civilians around the world.

The Iran–Israel Conflict in the Region

The tensions between Iran and Israel have to be seen in the context of the larger political and ideological struggles in West Asia. Both countries have long been suspicious of each other, driven by strategic rivalry, regional influence and security concerns. Over time, this rivalry expanded to include not just political disagreement but also military confrontations, proxy conflicts, intelligence operations and cyber warfare. Rising tensions around the Strait of Hormuz were symptomatic of the larger instability of the region. Reports of attacks on commercial ships, military deployments, drone strikes and fears of retaliation created an atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity. These developments turned the region into one of the most dangerous geopolitical flashpoints in the world. Other global and regional powers

were also indirectly involved in the conflict. The crisis drew diplomatic or strategic support, such as the United States and Saudi Arabia and various Gulf states. The regional conflict thus took on global implications.

Hans Morgenthau, a famous international relations scholar, believed that international politics is essentially determined by power politics and national interest. The crisis in the Strait of Hormuz clearly demonstrates the pursuit of strategic interests by states, which often increase insecurity and humanitarian suffering. Modern conflicts, at the same time, expose the limits of power politics. "Military escalation may achieve short-term strategic objectives, but very often it creates long-term humanitarian disasters. Therefore, modern international relations have an ever greater need for diplomatic solutions, humanitarian cooperation and mechanisms for transforming conflicts.

Humanitarian Consequences of the Crisis

The impact of the Strait of Hormuz crisis has been extensive and multidimensional. Modern conflicts no longer affect only soldiers or political leaders, rather common people suffer the most severe consequences.

- **Psychological Fear and Human Insecurity:** One of the major and immediate effects of the present Israel and Iran crisis is the rise of fear and psychological insecurity among the civilian populations. Constant reports of military escalation stress among millions of people. Children, women, migrant workers, and elderly populations became particularly vulnerable to psychological trauma. The fear of war impacts social relations, educational systems, community trust, and mental health. Humanitarian crises therefore involve not only physical destruction but emotional suffering and social instability. The idea of "positive peace" developed by Norwegian peace scholar Johan Galtung is not simply the absence of war; it involves social justice, human security and freedom from fear. The crisis in the Strait of Hormuz illustrates the relevance of this concept because, even without a total war, fear and insecurity remained in civilian life. Humanitarian social work is important to address such conditions by means of counselling, community support, trauma care and peace education. Post-conflict societies tend to remain unstable and riddled with mistrust without psychological rehabilitation.
- **Economic Crisis and Inflation:** The Crisis also created major economic tension across the world. Because the strait of Hormuz is a crucial route for global oil transportation, fears of disruption immediately affected energy prices. Raise oil prices increased transportation costs, electricity expenses, industrial production costs and food prices. Inflation impacts the poor more severely and thus developing countries have faced a lot of hardship. Poor families spend a larger part of their income on basic items like food, transport and fuel. The increase in prices, therefore, often gives rise to hunger, poverty, unemployment and social dissatisfaction. Disruptions in maritime trade routes, according to international

reports, destabilized global supply chains and impacted the availability of essential commodities. Humanitarian agencies warned that prolonged instability could exacerbate economic inequality and deepen social suffering. However in this context, Mahatma Gandhi's words are very relevant: "Poverty is the worst form of violence." This is why economic instability follows geopolitical conflicts, and can be seen as an indirect form of violence against vulnerable communities.

- **Displacement and Migration:** One of the most serious humanitarian consequences of the present Israel and Iran conflict is the growing crisis of displacement, migration insecurity and civilian suffering across the world, especially in the Middle East. The conflict has expanded beyond direct military confrontation and is now affecting million of common people whose lives depend on regional stability. As per the recent report from the United Nations and the international organisation for migration (IOM), large numbers of civilian have been faced to leave their homes due to airstrikes, missile attacks and fears of further escalation. United Nation agencies reported that millions of people inside Iran have been displaced from major cities, particularly Tehran and surrounding urban areas, seeking safety in rural regions and neighbouring countries. At the same time, the conflict has created deep anxiety among migrant workers living in Gulf countries, many of whom come from South Asian nation such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka. These workers depend heavily on employment in the Gulf for the livelihoods, but growing regional instability has raised fears regarding job security, personal Safety and economic survival. Raising oil prices in transportation networks and uncertainty in labour market have increased the vulnerability of migrant communities. For many families, especially those dependent on remittances, the conflict has created an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty about the future.

  Displacement in the context of Iran and Israel war is not merely a matter of people moving from one place to another, it represents a profound humanitarian crisis that affect every aspect of human life. Displaced individual of a lose they are homes, jobs, savings and social support systems within a very short period. Mini struggle to access healthcare services, education for their children and stable housing. The psychological impact is equally severe, as families experiences trauma, anxiety and constant fear of violence. Recent event statements have warned that the widening conflict good trigger a large regional refugee crisis if diplomatic solutions are not achieved soon. Human security, as emphasized by the United Nations, extends military protection and includes access to food, health, employment, dignity and social well-being. The current conflict has threatened all of these dimensions simultaneously. Therefore, humanitarian rehabilitation has become a crucial requirement for long term peace and stability. Rehabilitation should include financial assistance for affected families, mental health support, rebuilding of damage communities, educational opportunities for displaced children and programs that help people reintegrate into society. Without such efforts, the consequences of displacement may continue long after the guns fall

silent, creating generations of insecurity, poverty and social instability across the region.

Humanitarian Social Work and Peacebuilding

The ongoing Israel and Iran conflict has demonstrated the critical importance of humanitarian social work in modern conflict zones. Beyond the immediate destruction caused by the missile attacks, air strikes and military operations, the conflict has created severe social and psychological challenges for civilians. Recent reports by the United Nation and various humanitarian organisations indicate that thousands of people have been displaced, while many other continuous to face fear, uncertainty and emotional distress. In such situations, humanitarian social workers play vital role in helping affected populations rebuild their lives. Their responsibilities extend far beyond providing emergency assistance. They offer trauma counselling to individuals suffering from the psychological effects of war, protect vulnerable group such as children, women and elderly and support families that have lost their homes and livelihoods. Humanitarian social workers also advocate for human rights, assist displaced communities and help ensure that basic needs such as healthcare, education and social support remain accessible during times of crisis. Their work contributes significantly to restoring hope and stability amount populations affected by violence.

At the same time the Iran- Israel conflict highlights the importance of peacebuilding as a long term process rather than a short term political solution. While ceasefire may temporary reduce the violence, sustainable peace requires rebuilding trust between communities and addressing the social damage caused by conflict. War often destroys relationships, weakens social institutions and creates deep divisions among people. Therefore effective peacebuilding must include justice, dialogue, rehabilitation, institutional Reform, community participation and the protection of human right. These elements help create the conditions necessary for lasting peace and reconciliation. The words of former South African president Nelson Mandela remain highly relevant in this context, “If you want to make peace with your enemy you have to work with your enemy.” His statement emphasizes the importance of dialogue and mutual understanding in resolving conflicts. As recent humanitarian reports have shown, the long term recovery of the region will depend not only on political agreements but also on efforts to restore human dignity, social cohesion and community resilience among those affected by the conflict.

India’s Strategic Interests in West Asia:

The ongoing Israel Iran conflict has significant implications for India because West Asia remains one of the most important regions for India's economic and strategic interests. A large share of India's crude oil and natural gas imports comes from the Gulf region and any instability in West Asia directly affects India's energy security and economic growth. Recent reports have highlighted concern over disruptions in

shipping routes and rising oil prices following military exchanges between Iran and Israel. India is also deeply connected to the region through its large Diaspora. More than eight million Indians live and work in Gulf countries, contributing billions of dollars in remittances to the Indian economy every year. Therefore, ensuring the safety and well-being of Indian citizens in the region remains a major priority for Indian foreign policy. At the same time India maintains strong diplomatic relations with both Iran and Israel. Iran is important for regional connectivity and Energy Corporation while Israel is one of the India's key partners in technology, defence and innovation. Managing these relationships during a period of conflict requires careful diplomacy and strategic balance.

India's Role in Conflict Resolution:

In response to the Iran - Israel crisis India has adopted a cautious and balanced diplomatic approach. Rather than supporting military escalation, India has consistently emphasized dialogue, restraint and peaceful resolution of disputes. This approach reflects India's long standing foreign policy tradition of strategy autonomy and non- alignment principles strongly advocated by India's First Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. India has reportedly called for respect for international law, production of civilians, maritime security and regionals stability. Recent diplomatic statements have stressed the need to prevent further escalation and encourage negotiations among all parties. By maintaining communication with both Iran and Israel and avoiding alignment with any single geo-political bloc, India seeks to contribute to regional peace while protecting its national interest. This balanced position has strengthened India's image as a responsible global actor committed to diplomacy and hum

Maritime Security and Naval Cooperation:

The running Iran - Israel conflict has also highlighted the growing importance of maritime security for countries that depend heavily on international trade and energy supplies. For India, the security of sea routes in the Arabian Sea, the Gulf region and the state of Hormuz is of critical importance because a large portion of its oil and gas imports passes through these waters. Recent international reports have noted concerns about possible disruptions to commercial shipping following military tensions between Iran Israel. Such disruptions can affect not only fuel supplies but also transportation of essential goods, including food, medicines and industrial products. In response to these developments, India increased Maritime surveillance and strengthened naval preparedness to endurethe safety and of merchant vessels and Indian Maritime interest. These measures were aimed at preventing economic instability and protecting the uninterrupted flow of trade that supports millions of livelihoods across the country.

India's actions also reflect the growing significance of maritime diplomacy in contemporary international relations. Modern conflicts are no longer confined to battlefield, they increasingly affect global trade networks and humanitarian supply chains. Safe and secure sea routes are therefore essential for both economic prosperity and human will being. Through enhance naval patrols, cooperation with regional partners and continues monitoring of maritime activities India has sought to contribute to stability in the wider Indian Ocean region. At the same time, India has maintained its balanced diplomatic approach by encouraging dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. By protecting shipping lanes while avoiding direct involvement in the conflict. India has demonstrated its commitment to regional peace, international corporation and humanitarian concerns. These reports highlight how maritime security has become an important tool not only for safeguarding national interest but also for reducing the wider economic and humanitarian consequences of geopolitical conflicts such as the ongoing Iran -Israel war.

India as a Peacebuilding Actor:

The conflict between these two countries has once again highlighted the importance of countries that can act as constructive peacebuilder in times of regional crisis and India is well positioned to play such a role. In this situation India maintains diplomatic relations with both the countries, which give it a unique ability to communicate with different sides during periods of tensions. Recent international reports have emphasized that the conflict has not only caused military and political instability but has also affected civilian, disrupted trade routes, increased energy insecurity and raised concerns about a wider regional escalation. In this context, India has consistently called for restraint, dialogue, de-escalation and the peaceful resolution of disputes. India's growing international influence, long experience in multilateral diplomacy, and its historical image as a country that supports sovereignty and peaceful coexistence strengthen its credibility as a potential mediator and peacebuilding actor. Rather than viewing security only through a military lens, India has highlighted the importance of protecting civilians, maintaining regional stability and ensuring uninterrupted economic and humanitarian cooperation. This approach reflects the belief that lasting piece cannot be achieved through military confrontation alone. The words of the Dalai Lama remain highly relevant to the present situation “Peace does not mean an absence of conflict, differences will always be there. Peace means solving these differences through peaceful means.” India’s response to the Iran - Israel conflict largely reflects this philosophy by encouraging communication, diplomacy and cooperationas the most effective paths towards long term peace and stability in West Asia.

Challenges before India:

Although India can act as a mediator but such situations has created several challenges for India, affecting both its economy and foreign policy. One of the

biggest concerns is India's heavy dependence on energy imports from West Asia. Recent reports in international newspapers and news channels have highlighted that tensions in the region have increased fears of disruptions in the strait of Hormuz, a vital route through which a significant portion of the world's largest oil and LPG is transported. As a result global crude oil prices have experienced fluctuations, raising concerns about higher fuel costs in India. Rising oil prices can directly affect the prices of petrol, diesel, LPG cylinders, transportation, food products and other essential commodities increasing the financial burden on ordinary citizens. At the same time, India must carefully balance its diplomatic relation with Iran Israel countries the United State and other major powers. Any perception on favouring one side could affect important economic and strategic partnerships.

Another challenge is the safety of million of Indian living and working in Gulf countries, whose livelihood and remittances are important for many Indian families and for the national economy. Furthermore, modern geopolitical conflicts are no longer limited to conventional welfare. Cyberattacks, information welfare, economic sanctions and proxy conflicts have made international crises more complex and unpredictable. In such a situation, India needs a balanced strategy that combines diplomatic engagement, economic resilience, energy diversification, strategic preparedness and humanitarian cooperation. By strengthening these areas, India can better protect its national interests while continuing to support peace, stability and dialogue in a region that remains vital to is economic and strategic future.

The importance of such rehabilitation and peace for long period:

This conflict demonstrates that lasting peace cannot be achieved through ceasefires alone. It also requires rehabilitation and long term peacebuilding efforts. Recent reports from international Media and humanitarian organisations have highlighted how the conflict has damaged infrastructure, displace civilians, disrupted economic activities and created psychological trauma among affected populations. These consequences extend beyond the conflict zone and indirectly affect countries such as India. Rising tensions in West Asia have contributed to fluctuations in global oil and LPG prices, increasing concerns about inflation and higher living cost for Indian citizens. Since India depends heavily on energy imports from the region, prolonged instability can affect transportation, food prices and overall economic growth.

Therefore, rebuilding affected communities, restoring livelihoods, supporting mental health, improving education and helping displaced people returned to normal life are essential for sustainable peace. Humanitarian social workers play a cru role in this process by helping individuals and communities recover from the social and emotional impacts of conflict. As former US President observed that, “peace is not just the absence of conflict, Peace is thecreation of an environment where all can flourish.” The current crisis clearly shows that without rehabilitation, justice and social development, conflicts can continue to create instability long after the fighting ends.

Conclusion:

The Strait of Hormuz crisis represents one of the most important geopolitical and humanitarian challenges of the contemporary era. The conflict surrounding Iran and Israel demonstrated how regional tensions can rapidly affect global trade, energy system, migration, food security and civilian wellbeing. The humanitarian consequences of the crisis included economic instability, inflation, displacement, psychological trauma and disruption of humanitarian supply chains. These challenges revealed the deep relationship between the conflict and human security. India emerged as a significant diplomatic actor advocating peace, de-escalation, and regional stability. Through balanced diplomacy, maritime cooperation, and humanitarian concern, India attempted to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. India emerges as a significant diplomatic actor advocating peace, de-escalation and regional stability. Through balance diplomacy, Maritime Corporation and humanitarian concern, India attempted to contribute to conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The crisis also demonstrated the importance of humanitarian social work in rehabilitation and peacebuilding process. Sustainable peace requires not only ceasefire and political negotiations but also emotional healing, social justice, economics stability and community rebuilding. In the coming years, India's role in humanitarian diplomacy and regional peacebuilding is likely to become increasingly important. As a rising global power with strong regional connections, India has the potential to contribute significantly towards peace cooperation and humanitarian stability in waste Asia and beyond As Martin Luther King jr. wisely stated, “We must learn to live together as brother or perish together as fools.” This message remains deeply relevant in today's conflict ridden world where humanity’s future increasingly depends upon cooperation, dialogue and peacebuilding.

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Preserving Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge for Sustainable Rural Development: A Review on Challenges and Scope in Northeast India

Dr. Amlan Das[1]
Antara Ghosal[2]
Prof. Gangabhushan M. Molankal[3]

Abstract

The paper critically examines the complex interplay between Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and sustainable rural development in Northeast India and analyses the challenges and opportunities. IKS is a time-tested method that is a testimony of endurance and immensely contributes to the sustainable management of resources. Drawing on a comprehensive secondary review of literature, the present study helps in understanding the indigenous knowledge practices in Northeast India align intrinsically with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). Traditional agricultural systems such as Jhum cultivation, bamboo drip irrigation, and integrated agroforestry in the region demonstrate remarkable ecological resilience while ensuring food sovereignty for indigenous communities. However, with time, these knowledge systems are facing existential threats from market-driven agricultural transformations, policy neglect, climate change impacts, and intergenerational knowledge erosion.

Keywords: *Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Sustainable Development Goals, Challenges, Scope*

Introduction

Globally, with the growing population, ensuring sustainable food and dietary requirements is a challenge faced in the present century. Since the 1980s, intensified environmental issues such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, and global food crisis have accelerated the demand for cultivation and optimum utilisation of natural resources (Foley, et al., 2011). It is estimated that by 2050, the world population will reach 9.5 billion, necessitating that food production increase more than twofold (Godfray et al., 2010; FAO, 2016). To meet the growing demand, about 80% of the total arable land is cultivated with monocrops such as rice, corn, wheat, and soybeans,

[1] Dr. Amlan Das, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, The Assam Royal Global University, Guwahati. Gmail: amlandas.aus@gmail.com

[2] Antara Ghosal, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar. Gmail: antara.2204@gmail.com

[3] Prof. Gangabhushan M. Molankal, Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Assam; Gmail: gangabhushan@gmail.com

which is seriously diminishing the genetic diversity of agriculture. Moreover, a rise in the overutilisation of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, climate change, and exploitation of natural resources have further triggered degradation of the socio-ecological cost of the ecosystem (Phungpracha, Kabsuntisukmongkon, & Panya, 2016; Godfray et al., 2010). As reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDGs) of the United Nations to "end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture", efforts have been made to end hunger, through the availability and accessibility of food that encompasses food quality and aspects of sustainability (Bene et al., 2019; Fanzo, 2019).

Agriculture is one of the largest sectors in India and continues to be a mainstay of the majority of the population. Presently, approximately 58.4% of the workforce in India is engaged in the agricultural sector as cultivators or agricultural labourers (Kapur, 2018). As majority of the population in the country lives in rural India, most people are dependent on the forest and natural resources for their survival and daily livelihood. The majority of them are small-scale farmers and subsistence cultivators who depend on the available resources in the local environment and use the indigenous agricultural knowledge for their daily survival. Various sustainable agricultural practices, such as agroforestry, terrace farming, crop rotation, shifting cultivation, and so on, are in practice by these farmers that are ecologically safe and help them in meeting their day-to-day needs. Multicropping are done by tribes such as *Adiyan*, *Barda*, *Bhil, Gond, Malaikudi, Soliga*, etc. (Shambulingappa & Mansur , 2018). In Jharkhand, practices such as Organic manure, Herbicides are used as inputs, Stone bunding, Spur bunding, In-situ moisture conservation, and Mulching are used by the *Munda*, *Santhal*, *Oraon, and Bhumij* (Dey & Sarkar, 2011). The innate knowledge possessed by the communities is a result of continuous experiences, adaptations, and innovations, which can be complementary to the modern scientific and technological mechanisms adopted to bring economic and social development.

The Northeast India is a rich tapestry of indigenous knowledge systems that have sustained for centuries. The region comprises eight states, viz Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Sikkim. The region is a diverse array of indigenous tribes comprising 220 ethnic communities (Jain, 2016), and each with their distinct language, tradition, cultural practice, art forms, and unique practices.

The objective of the review paper is to analyse the different indigenous knowledge practices, particularly in the context of agriculture, and to understand how these knowledge practices contribute to environmental sustainability, food security practices, and rural development in Northeast India. The study also aims to highlight the contemporary challenges that are threatening the preservation of such indigenous knowledge and to explore the scope for integrating the indigenous knowledge practices for sustainable rural development in the region.

Methodology

As the study is review-based, secondary sources of data were used to understand indigenous agricultural practices and the challenges faced in the states. The data was systematically collected through an extensive review of various official documents and websites, as well as research publications. These included literature from the World Bank, FAO, Springer, Scopus, MoAFW, and Sage, which were the databases used for this review. The following keywords were used in searches: indigenous knowledge, agricultural practices, sustainable methods, forest resources, water management practices, sustainable development goals, challenges, prospects, and sustainable rural development. The articles identified in the review were peer-reviewed and written in English, published between 1990 - 2023. The search for the research work telescoping back to this timeframe was necessary to include studies conducted back in the 1990s and to identify the first and seminal studies based on the reported work on indigenous practices recorded. Systematic reviews were used to assess the quality of the articles. The abstracts and texts of the articles were reviewed for relevancy. Duplicates, reviews, editorials focussing solely on traditional principles, and scientific studies were all excluded.

The initial literature search was 220 articles. Among those 40 articles on indigenous knowledge, indigenous agricultural practices, water management systems, sustainable development goals, forest resources, and rural development were identified from the initial search and were included in this review paper. Figure 1 below illustrates the search methodology.

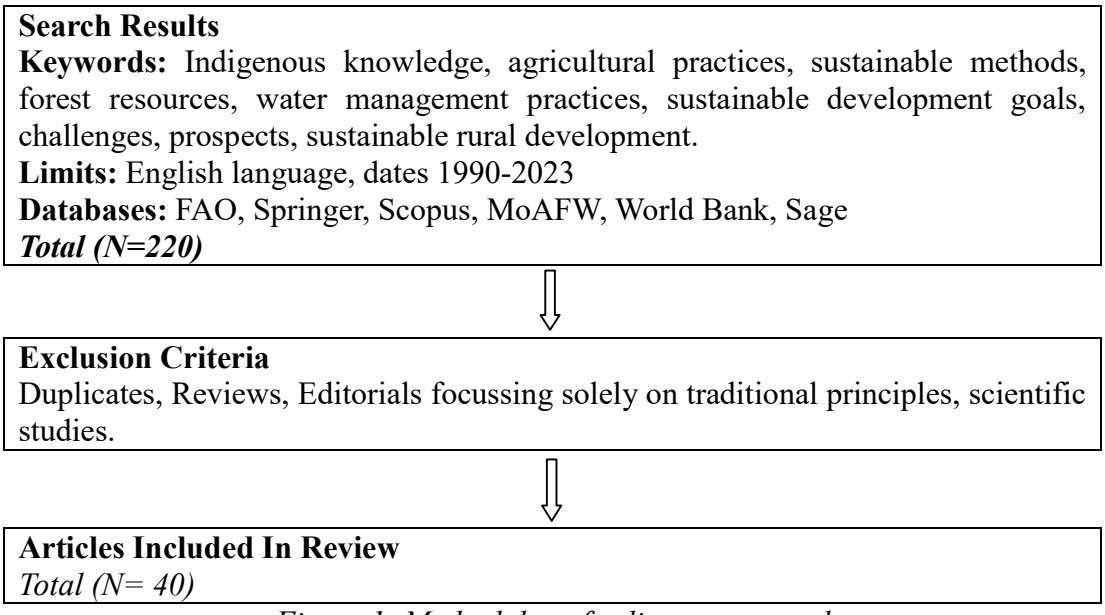


Figure 1: Methodology for literature search

North East India: In the context of the Indigenous Knowledge System and Sustainability

The Northeast India is a hub of ethnic communities engaged in practicing diverse and sustainable modes of farming, livestock rearing, water management, forest management, and healthcare systems, in tandem with the region's complex terrain, climatic conditions, and rich flora and fauna (Shaw, Natori, & Edake, 2022). Community management practices, multi-cropping pattern integrated with livestock rearing, fishing, and horticulture by optimal utilisation of locally available resources, promote local food sovereignty within the communities. Thus, to have a clearer understanding of indigenous practices and their relevance to sustainability in the regional context, the following sections provide a detailed discussion.

Indigenous Agricultural Practices in Northeast India

Indigenous agricultural practices are the original method of farming that has been practiced for centuries. These practices have sustained the agro biodiversity and ensured food security of people by balancing the present needs and safeguarding for future generations. The indigenous and tribal communities have been practicing distinctive agricultural and land management techniques that are in tandem with the complex ecology of the North-eastern states.

The agricultural practices of the indigenous communities with their genetic varieties of seeds demonstrate great resilience to environmental shocks. For a comprehensive understanding of the indigenous agricultural methods in the Northeast region, the following Table 1 discusses the agricultural practices specific to each state:

Sl. No.	States	Some Important Tribes	Indigenous Agricultural Practices	References
1	Assam	Boro, Dimasa, Chutia, Mishing, Karbi, Rabha	Double Transplanting, Bari system of farming	Barooah & Pathak (2009); Rautaray (2002)
2	Meghalaya	Khasi, Jaintia, Garo	Shifting Cultivation, Terrace or Bun cultivation, Alder based farming, Bamboo based farming	Jeeva, Laloo, & Mishra (2006)
3	Mizoram	Lusai, Pawi, Hmar, Mar	Shifting cultivation, Bun cultivation, Rotational Bush Fallow Agriculture	Sati (2019)
4	Manipur	Meities, Kuki, Nagas	Shifting Cultivation, Bun cultivation, Trans-plantation of crops	Seitinthang (2014)
5	Nagaland	Angami, Konyak,	Shifting Cultivation, Wet Terrace Rice Cultivation,	Solo & Kikhi (2021);

		Chakhesang, Rengma, Kuki, Zeliang	Alder Tree-Based farming, ZABO	Murry & Das (2021)
6	Arunachal Pradesh	Adi, Apatani, Nyishi, Mishmi, Singhpo	Shifting Cultivation, Terrace cultivation, Fish cum Paddy cultivation	Ali & Shivalingaiah (2022)
7	Tripura	Tripuri, Chakma, Naong, Santal, Lushai, Munda	Fish cum vegetable cultivation, settled cultivation, fish cum duckery culture	Saha & Nath (2013)
8	Sikkim	Lepcha, Bhutia, Limbu, Mon, Chang	Shifting Cultivation, Dhankheti, Mandarin-Intercrops	Subba (2009)

Table 1: List of some important tribes and their indigenous agricultural practices in Northeast India

Some of the indigenous agricultural practices are discussed below.

Slash and Burn Agriculture or Shifting Cultivation: In the upland of Northeast India, shifting cultivation, locally known as *Jhum*or *Jhumming* is a dominant form of agricultural practice. *Jhumming* is the means of survival and sustenance of most of the rural livelihoods in the region. Shifting cultivation is not only a form of agricultural practice or land use system among the tribal farmers in the Northeast region, but a whole system of religious beliefs, rituals, and attitudes along with farming (Shaw, Natori, & Edake, 2022). In essence, shifting cultivation in the region is more than an agricultural practice. It is an integral part of the region's cultural identity, which is deeply interwoven with spiritual beliefs, traditions, and means of livelihood for the tribal farming communities.

Alder-Based *Jhum* Cultivation in Nagaland: It is a unique practice among the Angami community in Nagaland. This is a traditional practice in the *Jhum* field where *Alnus Nepalensis,* also known as the Himalayan Alder plant, is planted. It is a non-legume tree that helps in fixing the atmospheric nitrogen and helps in maintaining the soil fertility through leaf litter decomposition, burning of freshly pollarded tree leaves before cultivation (Giri, et al., 2020) . Many scientific studies confirmed the high soil fertility and microbial population in alder-based *Jhum* cultivation compared to the conventional shifting cultivation.

Zabo System of Farming in Nagaland: Another indigenous type of agricultural practice is used by the farmers in Nagaland for rice cultivation in a terraced field known as Zabo. The practice is mainly used by the farmers in Kikuma village of Phek district of Nagaland (Das, Gujre, Devi, & Mitra, 2023). This system of cultivation is a combination of forest, agriculture, horticulture, fishery, animal husbandry, along with soil conservation and water management systems (Kithan , 2014). The upper portion,

particularly the hill slopes, is covered with forests, while water harvesting tanks are strategically placed in the middle section. The lower part of the hill is designated for livestock with cattle yards and paddy fields.

***Apatani* Fish-cum-Paddy Cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh:** It is one of the sustainable and recognised integrated agricultural practices among the *Apatani* tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The farming practice, also known as Aji, is a traditional knowledge-based practice where fish and paddy are cultivated together in wet terraces and millets on the bunds/sides of the farmland (Tynsong, Dkhar, & Tiwari, 2020). In this farming system, small pits are dug, and each plot is stocked with various fish species, including common carp and silver carp. The entire farmland is submerged under water, and the fish come out from the pits and move into the paddy fields. Domestic wastes are used as manure in the field, which helps the soil to retain its fertility, along with providing food to the fish, helping the fish and the crops to grow.

***Bun* (Terrace) Farming in Meghalaya:** Another type of indigenous farming technique is the *Bun* farming system practiced among the *Khasi* and *Jaintia*tribes in Meghalaya. This system involves the clearing of the land and forming heaps over raised beds, which are locally called *Buns*. After making the Buns, they are allowed to dry and are covered in layers of soil and then burned. Once the burning is done, the *Buns* are cooled, and cultivation of crops is started in the field (Giri, et al., 2020). A wide diversity of crops is cultivated, including paddy, maize, vegetables, ginger, potatoes, and beans, which are the most preferred crops in the *Bun* cultivation. Additionally, a similar system of fallowing like in *Jhum* cultivation is practiced, where the land is left for 2-3 years for rejuvenating (Giri, et al., 2020).

Rice-based farming system in Tripura: Rice cultivation constitutes an important part of the people in Tripura, where they have relied on using centuries-old techniques for generations. The cultivation of rice is practiced in various landforms, including upland rice cultivation, medium upland rice cultivation, and lowland rice cultivation (Giri, et al., 2020). Further, alongside rice-based cultivation, fish, livestock, fruits, and vegetables are cultivated together, forming a holistic approach to agriculture (Das, et al., 2015). Integrating livestock rearing with rice cultivation not only helps the small-scale farmers to enhance agricultural productivity but also helps them in strengthening their financial stability.

Home Gardening: Home gardening is another form of agroforestry practiced in Northeast India. It provides a universal remedy to address food insecurity, ensuring household-level food security by directly contributing to the accessibility of food that can be harvested, prepared, and fed to family members on a daily basis (Marsh, 1998). More than 50% supply of fresh vegetables and fruits, along with medicinal plants and herbs, can be met from these household kitchen gardens (Marsh 1998; Suri, 2018). The production of these is economically viable, practiced in small patches of land, and is considered a sustainable model by the farming community (Marsh 1998; Suri 2018).

Role of Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Sustainable Water ManagementSystems: Apart from the indigenous agricultural practices, the traditional irrigation and water management system of the indigenous farmers is another unique concept that is highly location-specific and sustainable in nature. Traditional irrigation systems like the *Dong*, Bamboo drip irrigation, *Cheo-ozihi*, etc., are prevalent forms of systems found in the hill slopes and riverine plains of the region (Das, Gujre, Devi, & Mitra, 2023). Reference can be made to *Dong's system in Assam,* which is a 100-year-old community-based irrigation system that was developed and used by the *Bodo* tribe. In this system, water is diverted from nearby streams or rivers by digging canals, and it reaches the houses used for both domestic and agricultural purposes without wastage (Devi, 2018). This practice is particularly efficient during winters when there is a scarcity of water. Further, Bamboo drip irrigation is another indigenous irrigation system that was developed by the indigenous farmers in the *Jaintia* hills of Meghalaya. This form of irrigation helps in overcoming the irrigation problem on hill slopes. Here, water from a natural source, such as streams located at a higher level, is tapped and transported to the irrigation field through bamboo channels, and the water is discharged in the field in drips or trickles (Sen , Devi, & Singha, 2015).

Role of Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Sustainable Management of Forest Resources: The traditional governance system of the indigenous people and the local communities is embedded in nature and the ancestral belief system that is framed keeping in mind to protect nature. The belief system is based on the notion that all the elements in nature are alive and should be respected and protected in their natural habitat. Thus, this belief system that is passed on in the form of storytelling and tales remains deeply rooted in the subconsciousness of the people, resulting in unconsciously worshipping and protecting nature. The connection between the indigenous peoples' beliefs and the traditional knowledge practices is a fundamental element in maintaining sustainability. The community-oriented biodiversity management is crucial in the rise of the exploitation of nature witnessed globally, and even in Northeast India. Several challenges such as unscientific mining in Meghalaya, hydropower projects in Arunachal Pradesh, clearing of hills and forests in the name of development in Assam and so on are some of the ongoingissues that are putting the forest resources in the region under severe threat (Milupi, et.al 2017; Chabukdhara & Singh, 2016).

Role of Indigenous Knowledge Practices in Sustainable Management of Food Systems in Northeast India: The global obligation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development with 17 goals as adopted by the states envisaged to bring peace and prosperity to the planet and the people in the present as well as fulfilling the need for the future. In this context to achieve the goals, traditional indigenous knowledge plays a crucial role.

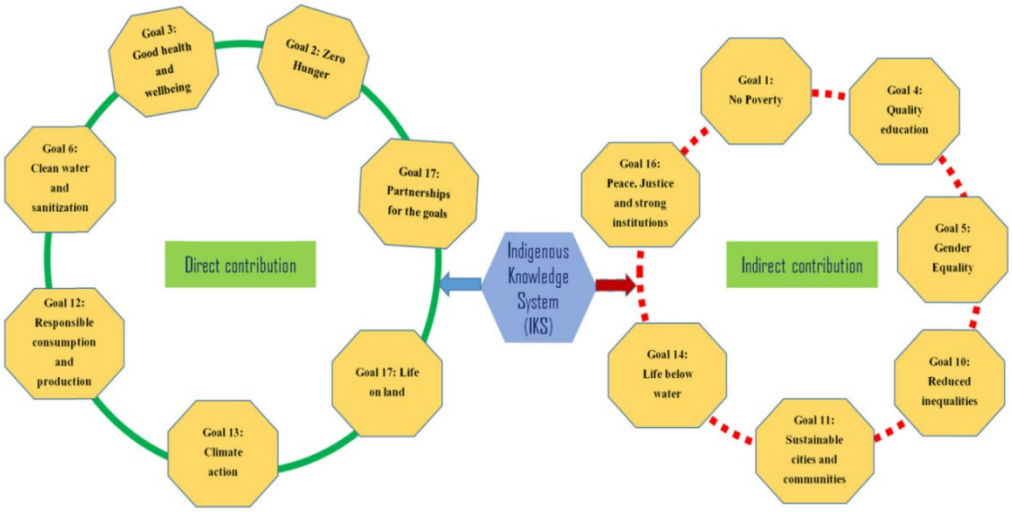


Figure 2: Contribution of Indigenous Knowledge towards SDGs

Source: Negi et al. (2021)

Recognising and upscaling these indigenous practices holds the answer to issues and challenges such as malnutrition, food insecurity, and poverty. Indigenous Knowledge Systems are inherently holistic, encompassing sustainable agricultural methods, natural resource management, and community-driven governance that align closely with the SDGs. Critically, indigenous knowledge makes a significant contribution to multiple SDGs.

- Goal 1 (No Poverty): By providing livelihood opportunities rooted in local resources and traditional knowledge expertise, indigenous practices can empower the marginalised communities and reduce economic vulnerability.
- Goal 2 (Zero Hunger): The adoption of sustainable agricultural practices such as mixed cropping, agro forestry, and natural farming ensures food security and resilience against growing climate change and related environmental shocks.
- Goal 3 (Good Health and well-being): Using herbal medicines and traditional healing practices, which are already adopted by many developed countries in their modern drug formulations, supports accessibility and culturally relevant healthcare.
- Goal 4 (Quality education): Indigenous knowledge promotes lifelong learning, intergenerational knowledge transfer, and fosters a deeper understanding of the local ecosystems and practices.
- Goal 5 (Gender Equality): By including women and elders in the decision-making process, who are not only the caregivers but are the main custodians of traditional knowledge. Indigenous knowledge recognises the vital role of communities and inclusive governance.

- Goal 6 (Clean water and Sanitation): Community-based water management systems and traditional water conservation techniques contribute to the sustainable management of water use.
- Goal 13 (Climate Change): Climate-adaptative agricultural methods and resource management help in ensuring community resilience to emerging environmental changes.
- Goal 15 (Life on Land): The protection of biodiversity through sacred groves, sustainable ecosystem stewardship safeguards terrestrial ecosystems.

However, the most critical challenge lies in bridging the gap between traditional knowledge and modern policies. Upscaling the indigenous practices requires not only documentation and validation but genuine collaboration with the local and indigenous communities. Respecting and protecting their rights, intellectual property, and cultural independence is of utmost importance in the process of recognising and mere tokenism must be avoided.

Challenges Faced in Preserving Indigenous Agricultural Practices in Northeast India

Although the prevalence of indigenous food productive systems in Northeast India is notable, traditional practices are facing challenges in recent times, primarily due to environmental and societal causes. Some of the challenges faced by the farmers in the region are discussed below-

Labour-intensive nature of the indigenous agricultural practices: A major challenge for the decline of indigenous agricultural practices is the labour-intensive techniques involved in the agricultural process. Traditional methods, such as manual ploughing, hand-harvesting, organic composting, etc., require significant time and physical effort, often engaging the entire households or communities(Patel, Sharma, & Singh, 2020). However, with the change infamilial and socio-economic dynamics, especially rural-to-urban migration, increasing trend of nuclear family, declining youth interest in farming, and so on, drastically reduced the labour availability for agricultural practice(Sharma, Kanta, Dwivedi, & Rani, 2020).

Population pressure and shrinking *Jhum* cycle:Secondly, increasing population and reduced*Jhum* cycle to meet the food demandare other significant challenges faced by the indigenous agricultural practices in the region. Historically, the *Jhum* cultivation involved a longer fallow periodranging from 10 to 15 years. This cycle allowed the land to regenerate naturally and regain fertility. However, with rising population and the growing need to meet food security, the fallow period has significantly reduced to 2 to 3 years in many areas. This shortened cycle resulted in soil degradation, loss of fertility, and declining crop yields, thereby affecting the long-term viability of the practice(Upadhaya et al., 2019; Prokop & Poreba, 2012).

Generational disconnect and growing interest in modernisation: Increased westernisation in the region, along with the growing concept of capitalism and private

property, power conflicts are pushing the farmers to go for cultivation of cash crops, yielding higher income(Shaw, Natori, & Edake, 2022). Moreover, the issue of poor returns for agricultural produce has far-reaching implications for farmers, extending beyond financial losses. A concerning trend has been triggered among the farmers, particularly the male farmers, migrating to urban areas in search of an alternate source of livelihood, such as in construction work, street vending, and other informal work that allure them.

Unorganised market for finished products: This is another significant challenge faced by the farmers in the region. The agricultural market is in bad shape all over India. The Minimum Support Price provided to the farmers is not sufficient for them. Small farmers, in particular, possess limited bargaining power compared to larger players in the sector, which adversely affects their ability to negotiate better prices for their produce and secure fair market opportunities (Hans, Govindaswamy, & Udupi, 2024).

Impact of climate change: The impact of climate change is far-reaching, affecting not only the timing and intensity of rainfall but also contributing to other environmental changes such as rising temperature, an increase in pest attacks and disease, and shifting seasons. All these disrupt the traditional farming practices in the region, affecting food security and food sovereignty in the long run. According to a report by the United Nations, the indigenous peoples are the first to face direct consequences of climate change because of their close relationship with the environment and its natural resources (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2024). Further, the study by Baruah (2022) also reports that the most visible effect of climate change can be witnessed in the hydrological system where the rainfall pattern has tremendously changed in the Northeast region resulting in sudden extreme spells of heavy rainfall for some days and long spells of dry days that is detrimental for the soil and the crops.

Inadequate research and support mechanisms: Another major challenge faced by farmers in Northeast India is the erosion and eventual loss of oral transmission of indigenous knowledge and wisdom. Traditionally, agricultural knowledge, such as crop rotation patterns, soil fertility management, weather forecasting, and pest control, has been passed down orally through generations. However, with increasing urban migration, generational gaps, and the growing dominance of the formal education system, the traditional wisdom is devalued and is on the verge of being forgotten (Jashwant S., 2024). Further, the absence of proper documentation and archiving is slowly vanishing with the elder generations. Compounding this is the lack of institutional support for recognising, recording, and preserving indigenous agricultural practices in the region.

Prospects for Integration of Indigenous Agricultural KnowledgePractices for Rural Development in Northeast India

The development of the North-eastern region received significant impetus with the implementation of the 'Look East Policy' in the 1990s (renamed as 'Act East Policy' in 2014). The identification of the region as a zone for commercial trade expansion with the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries facilitated its development across several dimensions. Increased attention through commerce, connectivity, culture sharing, and infrastructure development remained an important agenda under the policy (Barua, 2020). Reference can be made to allocated funds for the Northeast region, which have increased by 110% from Rs 36,108 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 76,040 crore in 2022-23 for the overall development (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2022).

Agriculture, remaining a dormant part of the economy of the region, can harness significant economic growth with the help of effective policy implementation. The region produces high-quality fruits and serves as an exporter of fruits within the country and internationally, including bananas, kiwis, queen pineapples, jackfruits, lemons, and others that can be capitalised and accentuated for export purposes. The region has seen a significant rise in the export of agricultural products from USD 2.5 million in 2016-17 to USD 17.2 million in 2021-22 (Goswami, 2022). Recently, PM Modi discussed the eight pillars of development for the Northeastern region, and among those, natural farming is one parameter for development. Infrastructural development through rail, road, airways, and digital connectivity is already underway, which can further help the farmers in the region to export their products (Deka, 2020).The established practice of sustainable farming in the region has a great opportunity to augment production and facilitate exports.

Sustainable agricultural practices in the region are intrinsically linked to the SDGs goals, as agriculture plays a crucial role in combating poverty, ensuring food security, generating livelihoods, and enhancing nutrition. Advocating for organic and local agriculture, diverse cropping, and the restoration of traditional food systems in harmony with local ecosystems may facilitate the attainment of these goals. Additionally, limiting the use of chemical fertilizers and adopting sustainable methods contributes to climate resilience by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to these, the region is endowed with perennial rivers, streams, and *Beels* that provide a variety of local fish. Fish are consumed globally, and the presence of natural resources provides a good opportunity for the region to become a global supplier. There are more than 3000 varieties of fish in the region, and specifically, in 2019,Assam produced 3,27,000 metric tonnes of fish(Global South, ActionAid, Solidarity for Sustainable North East, 2019).Moreover, advanced and hi-tech horticulture such as climate resilient production technology, conserving existing germplasm, using the underutilised plant, and development of value chain to deal with post-harvest loss are some of the techniques that, if applied, can help in bringing sustainable rural development in the region (Deka, 2020). Thus, by promoting and safeguarding sustainable agricultural practices, the region is well-positioned to

achieve sustainable rural development and can emerge as a key contributor to global food and environmental goals.

Conclusion

Integrating modern knowledge with indigenous farming practices in Northeast India presents a promising pathway to opportunities for sustainable rural development. The traditional farming methods such as *Jhum* cultivation, Alder based farming, Zabo cultivation, *Bun* cultivation emphasised ecological balance and resource conservation and gel well with the growing national focus on natural and chemical-free farminghighlighted in the Union Budget 2023 through the launch of the National Mission on Natural Farming (Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, 2023). Moreover, the combination of sustainable water management system and blending the indigenous conservation practices with modern scientific approaches offers significant potential for development. Building upon this foundation, the establishment of agro-based industries such as processing units, preservation centers, and value-addition hubs can create employment opportunities and improve the economic viability of local produce.

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Educational Administration, Female Education, and Teacher Training in Colonial Assam (1875–1940)

Yesmin Sultana[1]
Dr. Nasruddin Khan[2]

Abstract

This paper studies the development of educational administration, female education, and teacher training in colonial Assam between 1875 and 1940. A close reading of archival records and secondary works reveals how the demand for girls' education led to the need for teachers' training in the period. This was realized through educational reforms. Local boards, District Committees, appointment of Inspectresses, and efforts of missionary organizations are vital in this regard. The constraints included inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained women teachers, and prevailing social customs. Even so, the government and missionaries built female educational institutions in colonial Assam. This was done to create a "self-reflexive" progressive image.

Keywords: *Female Education, Colonial Assam, Teacher Training, Christian Missionaries, Educational Administration*

Introduction

Assam was administratively a part of Bengal before the establishment of the Chief Commissionership, and both regions shared similar educational policies. In 1871, Bengal's new policy transferred responsibility of primary education to local bodies, making it their duty to manage and oversee it. Assam adopted this policy as well. When Bengal's education policy was modified in 1879, Assam continued to follow the updated framework, reflecting the close alignment between the two regions' educational administrations during that period (Lahkar, 1987, p. 207). However, historian Renu Debi challenges this narrative, arguing that Assam was separated from Bengal in 1874 and began establishing its own independent education department to formulate distinct policies (Debi, 1987, pp. 11–12). This claim suggests that Assam was moving towards autonomy in education, contrary to the idea of continued dependence on Bengal's policies. The continued adoption of Bengal's policies even after separation suggests that Assam's new education department may have lacked the capacity or resources to create new mechanisms.

Partha Chatterjee (1989) argues that social and moral reform formed the ideological basis of the British rule in India. Women were central to this discourse. Female education became the one of the areas through which the state asserted its superiority.

[1] Yesmin Sultana, Research Scholar, Department of History, Assam University, Silchar

[2] Dr. Nasruddin Khan, Assistant Professor (History), Department of Law, Assam University, Silchar

Colonial governance was performing a "civilizing mission" in his opinion (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 623). It is interesting to study how such ideological inclinations were transformed to educational administration under colonial rule.

The role of missionary organizations and administrative measures in the development of female education in colonial Assam is critical here. It remains unclear how these policies directly influenced the accessibility and quality of education for women. Policies were introduced to develop female education in colonial Assam. School management was a collective effort involving various members. We have closely examined the colonial archive for this study.

This article argues that educational changes expanded female education in colonial Assam and politically legitimized the colonial state. It was an instrument by which a progressive self-image of the colonial state was created to strengthen its overall legitimacy.

Educational Administration

After Assam's separation from the East Bengal Presidency in 1874, the administration of education in the region was reorganized, and Dr. C.A. Martin, L.L.D., was appointed as the Inspector of Schools. He was directed to assume the role and functions of the Director of Public Instruction (D.P.I), assisted by seven deputy inspectors and eight sub-inspectors (Mukerji, 1962, pp. 321–322).

For the next eleven years, the responsibility for establishing, maintaining, and managing schools in Assam was allocated to the District Committees. The District Committees operated under the overall supervision of the education department, ensuring alignment with broader administrative goals while incorporating local leadership (Lahkar, 1987, p. 207). In June 1879, the government appointed Inspectors of schools, assigning them the responsibility for controlling and managing secondary education. Despite this, the D.C. and District Committees retained the authority to visit schools and provide suggestions for their management. The Welsh Calvinistic Mission managed the upper primary schools. It also dealt with matters related to the provincial funds in the Assam hills. They also established Boards responsible for maintaining primary schools in the region (Sharp, 1908, p. 59). Nurullah and Naik have argued that school education for females was very limited in many parts of India. In most places, boys received education while girls were often denied the opportunity to study. Traditional customs and social practices prevented girls from attending schools and continuing their education (Nurullah & Naik, 1951, p. 14).

On January 30, 1892, James took charge of education as the Director of Public Instruction, becoming the first officer in Assam's Education Department to officially hold this post. Later, on October 15, 1905, with the creation of a new province, N.L. Halward was appointed as the D.P.I. During 1905-06, each subdivision in Assam was assigned a deputy inspector who operated under the dual control of the Department of Education and the chairmen of the local boards. By 1908-09, two school inspectresses

were appointed. One was responsible for Chittagong and the Surma Valley Division, while the other oversaw Dacca, the Assam Valley Division, and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. After Assam was separated from East Bengal in 1912, Mr. R. Cunningham was appointed as the Director of Public Instruction, marking another shift in the administrative structure of education in the province (Mukerji, 1962, pp. 322–323). This progression illustrates the gradual establishment of a structured educational administration in Assam, reflecting an increasing focus on localized administration and the inclusion of women as inspectors. The administration of female education in schools included regular inspections to improve quality. Girls' schools in the province were classified into three categories for this purpose: Government High Schools for Girls, Government Middle Schools for Girls, and *Purdah* Schools, along with Training Classes for Girls (whether government-aided or not), *Zenana classes* (mission-led initiatives for the upper-class women), and home instruction. The responsibility for the administration and inspection of these schools was entrusted solely to the Inspectress of Schools. In 1909, rules and functions for the Inspectresses in Eastern Bengal and Assam were officially formulated to guide their roles effectively (Lahkar, 1987, pp. 220–221). In 1909, the Female Education Committee proposed appointing an Assistant Inspectress for each division of Eastern Bengal and Assam. These officers, expected to be highly qualified, were also recommended for inclusion in the Provincial Educational Service. The committee also emphasized that once Assistant Inspectresses were appointed, middle schools located in district headquarters should be visited exclusively by female inspecting officers (ASA, 1909, p. 50).

In 1916, Mr. A. W. Botham, the second secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, advocated for increasing the number of female Inspectresses. He emphasized a growing sentiment that the inspecting staff should consist of Indian women, reflecting the belief that both teaching and inspecting positions in female education must be filled by Indian ladies to address the challenges of girls' education effectively. The Chief Commissioner concurred with the Commissioner of the Surma Valley and Hill Districts, agreeing that the recruitment of Indian women was essential in solving the problem of female education. However, the suggestion to divide inspection duties between male and female officers received mixed reactions. While some supported this approach, others, including the Director of Public Instruction and the Chief Commissioner, dismissed it as unnecessary and inefficient. Instead, they proposed extending the existing system to ensure that all girls' schools were inspected exclusively by female Inspectresses or Assistant Inspectresses (ASA, 1916, p. 117). This decision underlined a pragmatic approach to improving female education inspection while acknowledging the limitations in resources and staffing. Inspectresses in Surma valley found travelling difficult. Inspectresses relied on boats in rains and *palkis* (sedan chairs or palanquins) during winter. These methods were difficult to manage financially complicating the development of girls' education. Drawing on Chatterjee (1989), these reforms can be seen as elements of the "civilizing mission" of the colonial state. The ultimate aim was to societal control by

changing women's education. But, we argue that all these measures were aimed at the "self-aggradisement" of which the "civilizing mission" was just a part.

Demand for Women Teachers

Social customs and traditions restricted women from taking up professions. They were expected to stay at home to assist their mothers with household chores. In rural areas, many girls also helped their parents in the fields (ASA, 1910, No. 5, p. 2). As a result, girls' education remained unsatisfactory, with limited opportunities for formal learning. This lack of educational advancement further led to an absence of female teachers and no teacher training institutes in Assam. To address this gap, Christian missionaries took the initiative. They established several schools and colleges across different provinces, playing a pioneering role in advancing women's education and teacher training. The Christian missionaries had two main objectives for establishing these schools. Firstly, they aimed to train women as teachers to serve in these schools and help in improving primary education. Secondly, they sought to provide education and training to girls who had been converted to Christianity, ensuring their integration into the mission's educational and social framework (Lahkar, 1987, pp. 139–140). These dual objectives not only addressed the immediate need for female teachers but also aligned with the missionaries' broader goal of promoting Christian values and education among the local population. Chatterjee (1989) observes that the colonial discourse portrayed Indian culture as "degenerate and barbaric", which gave justification to take up women issues. The notion of backwardness in women's education and scarcity of female teachers was theorized by the administration in this framework (Chatterjee, 1989, p, 623). We believe it showed self-fashioning, of which women's issues were an integral part. The need for women teachers was a part of creating an image of the state that was benevolent, powerful, and patronizing.

Christian Missionaries and Women Teachers' Training

The Christian missionaries took the initiative to open normal schools to train primary school teachers. These schools were established in key districts such as Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Nowgong, and Goalpara. The government supported the missionaries' efforts by providing grants-in-aid to these schools. As a result, these institutions produced trained teachers who were primarily employed in missionary schools, thereby strengthening the missionary education system (Debi, 1987, p. 63). However, as noted by Bina Lahkar in her book, during the early years the government showed a lack of initiative in addressing the need for qualified teachers. Despite the pressing demand for trained educators, the government did not take significant steps to establish teacher training facilities. While the Despatch of 1854 had recommended the creation of training institutions, this recommendation was not implemented effectively (Lahkar, 1987, p. 140). Historians like Milton S. Sangma and Victor Hugo Sword (Sword, 1992, p. 112) have contended that missionaries used education as the

main medium for evangelizing the population. Conversion and religious influence were most effective through schools. Girls' education and teacher training among the tribal population in the region was their main achievement. However, Sangma points out that formal Western education had been very limited in many hill areas before missionary activities (Sangma, 1993, p.vii-viii).

However, the establishment of normal schools for primary teachers, as recommended by the Despatch of 1854, was widely implemented over time. These schools functioned as boarding institutions, providing students who had already received a vernacular education with stipends to support their further studies (ASA, 1904, p. 17). While the implementation of normal schools in later years showed progress, the initial lack of government initiative, as Bina Lahkar has opined, reflects a missed opportunity to establish a cohesive and inclusive educational system. In addition to offering advanced general education, these schools focused on training students in teaching methodologies. Practical teaching experience was an integral part of the curriculum, allowing students to practice under supervision.

Missionaries played a significant role in advancing girls' education in Assam. Mary Carpenter, an English social worker, blamed the slow progress in women's education on the lack of trained female teachers. The government of India agreed to her demand of training schools for women. (Lahkar, 1987, p. 140). Other missionaries, like Miss Sweet, also contributed significantly to the cause. In 1876, Miss Sweet introduced the idea of boarding schools for girls, and in 1879, she established one in Gauhati, bringing two girls with her to start the school. Over time, the number of girls enrolled increased. The curriculum in these schools included practical skills such as plain sewing, weaving, spinning, and native housekeeping. Of the seventeen girls enrolled in the boarding school from 1875 to 1885, two passed the Government Lower Primary Examination, and one girl passed the Government Upper Primary Examination. She was sent to the Bethune School in Calcutta under the Lady Dufferin Fund to study English (The American Baptist Missionary Union, 1992, pp. 186–187).

The American Baptist Mission gave training classes to women, with the majority of the work carried out by missionary mistresses. They established training schools in Nowgong, where, on May 31st, 1931, five girls received instruction; one Hindu and four native Christians. However, it was unlikely that many Hindu girls from better-off families would consider joining these schools to pursue teaching as a profession (ASA, 1916, p. 60). Bina Lahkar argued that the lack of participation from communities other than Christians was because Christian mission institutions were not well-received by Hindus and Muslims (Lahkar, 1987, p. 140). According to the Director of Public Instruction in 1938, many parents strongly objected to sending their daughters to mission schools. G.D. Walker clarified that for the past 25 years, missionary schools had been carrying out the work well without any complaints (ASA, 1938, p. 3). However, this claim is contradicted by Hemanta Kumari Chaudhuri, who, on July 17th, 1902, complained about the missionary schools, stating that they only served Christians, had irregular attendance, lacked proper class divisions, and employed inadequately trained teachers (ASA, 1902, Nos. 120–127, p.

2). The situation described a significant gap between the claims of the missionary schools and the reality of their operations. That these schools were effectively serving their purpose, the complaints from both Hemanta Kumari Chaudhuri and the D.P.I point to serious flaws in the system. The lack of engagement from non-Christian communities may have arisen from a lack of inclusive and culturally sensitive programs that could have encouraged participation from all religious groups.

The Roman Catholic Mission from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills responded to the Committee with a well-defined plan for training schools. They proposed that candidates seeking admission must have successfully passed the Lower Primary stage and complete their education up to the end of the Middle Vernacular course. In addition to academic instruction, candidates would receive training in various types of needlework and domestic economy, ensuring a holistic education that prepared them for both teaching and practical life skills. The mission outlined that the entire course of training would be completed within four to five years (ASA, 1909, p. 175). This response demonstrates a thoughtful approach to teacher preparation, balancing academic rigor with practical skills, particularly suited for the socio-cultural context of the region. However, it also highlights a systemic dependency on mission-driven initiatives rather than comprehensive government-led planning for teacher education. All these efforts can be seen as the larger colonial project of social reform by Chatterjee as the normative basis of the British "civilizing mission." However, it can be asserted here that these missionary projects were a part of the self-glorification process whereby the state was killing two birds with a stone. It was fulfilling its commitment to proselytization but more significantly, showcasing its progressive image. It was partly done to outwit the critics of the empire.

Female Teacher Training and the Colonial State

The Education Commission of 1882 recognized that the shortage of women teachers caused backwardness of female education. It vouched for the training classes for women with financial assistance to be provided to private organizations involved in the training of female educators (Lahkar, 1987, p. 140). This recommendation aimed to address the critical need for qualified female teachers to improve the state of women's education.

Srijut Radha Nath Phukan, the chairman of the local board in 1916, observed that there was practically no demand for girls' schools at the time. He emphasized that such a demand would only arise when there were enough female teachers. According to him, the popularity and success of female education depended more on the availability of competent teachers than on the willingness of the people to send their daughters to school. He believed that offering liberal scholarships would be essential to attract girls to these training schools, thereby creating a pool of qualified female educators (ASA, 1916, p. 35). His vision underscored the importance of addressing foundational issues, such as teacher training and incentives, to ensure the growth and acceptance of female education in society.

The comparison of the number of schools across different districts highlights that the challenges faced in Assam were significantly different from those in Eastern Bengal. In Assam, finding female teachers for schools posed a major difficulty, and where such teachers could be recruited, special salary rates were likely required to attract and retain them *(*ASA, 1909, p. 58). R. Nathan, the President of the Female Education Committee, identified the scarcity of female teachers as one of the primary obstacles to the expansion and improvement of female education in the region. To address this issue, the committee emphasized the need to utilize all possible sources for recruiting and training girls and women to serve as teachers. They acknowledged that some missionary societies had established arrangements for training female teachers for their own schools, which had notably improved the efficiency of those institutions. Building on this approach, the committee proposed offering stipends to girls who had completed the primary stage of education to encourage them to pursue studies in middle vernacular schools. Upon completing the middle vernacular course, these girls would then serve as assistant teachers, thus addressing the teacher shortage (ASA, 1909, p. 173).

The 1900-1901 Report on Public Instruction in Assam provides a detailed account of the training schools and classes in the region. According to the report, there were nine training schools, of which three were aided private mission schools, while the training school at Shillong, although classified as a government institution, was essentially an aided mission school. This institution primarily trained teachers for mission schools in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In the plain districts, there was only one first-grade training school, located in Gauhati, which trained vernacular teachers for middle and upper primary schools. Additionally, there were five training schools across the districts of Cachar, Darrang, Sibsagar, and Lakhimpur, focused on training teachers for lower primary schools. Moreover, twelve training classes for lower primary school teachers were attached to middle schools across various districts, including one in Cachar, five in Goalpara, one in Kamrup, one in Darrang, two in Nowgong, one in Sibsagar, and one in Lakhimpur. However, the report highlights a significant gap: Sylhet, an important district, lacked a single training institution, underscoring a pressing need for educational infrastructure in the area (ASA, 1902, p. 5).

The issue of inadequate facilities for teacher training schools was also highlighted by G.D. Walker, Commissioner of the Surma Valley and Hill Division, in 1938. He notes that a training class Silchar Mission School began in 1913. For several years, the mission's female staff managed this along with regular duties. The government's limited financial assistance began in 1929. Shortage of staff, inadequate buildings, and insufficient equipment hampered the quality of teacher-training. Also, for the three years in between 1932 and 1935, another initiative, the *Guru* Training Classes, was introduced but eventually shut down, further highlighting the precarious state of teacher-training efforts during this period (ASA, 1938, p. 2).

Conclusion

We have tried to explain the change and development of school administration developed in colonial Assam in this study. The appointment of Inspectors of School and later on Directors of Public Instruction improved it. We have also attempted to show how the centralization of governance supported female education. Various types of schools for girls were established with female supervisors. They also faced problems like poor transport, lack of qualified teachers and social resistance. Local boards played prominent role despite logistic difficulties. The girls' schools and appointment of Insprectresses led to an increase in women participation in the system. The missionaries established girls' schools and teacher training institutes that brought education and religious propagation in the province. It seems school administration brought social change and modernization in education. The society was transformed as opportunities for women opened up and educational apparatus was formalised. Moving beyond Chatterjee, it can be argued that the state initiated a process of self-legitimization. This was done through women's education in order to recreate the colonial society after the late nineteenth century. Indian society was no longer the uncivilized "other". It was not just dominance over the indigenous population. The promotion of women's education helped in the creation of a satisfying "progressive self-reflexive image" for the colonial state. This was to silence critics, create efficiency in administration and most significantly, self-aggrandisement.

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Youth Involvement towards Community Disaster Risk Reduction: An Analysis

Suchita Kanoo[1]
Dr. Joyashri Dey[2]
Gitanjali Sharma[3]
Bidisha Deka[4]

Abstract

Disasters threaten communities globally, especially in developing contexts where poverty, environmental degradation, weak infrastructure, and limited preparedness intensify vulnerability. Disaster governance has shifted from response-oriented models to community-based, participatory approaches that value local capacities. Youth represent an underutilised social force whose energy, technological fluency, and social networks can contribute to preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience. This conceptual paper examines youth engagement in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) and proposes a four-pillar framework: youth empowerment, community-based disaster risk management, youth leadership, and sustainability. Using qualitative conceptual design with secondary data from peer-reviewed literature, international guidance, and policy frameworks, thematic analysis identified recurring concepts related to capacity building, participation, planning, leadership, and resilience. The paper argues that youth participation strengthens community resilience when connected to structured training, decision-making, institutional support, and community ownership. Youth support first aid, awareness, digital communication, early warning dissemination, volunteer mobilisation, risk mapping, and advocacy, though barriers like tokenistic participation, fragmented institutions, and inadequate resources limit their contribution. The paper concludes that social work practice and policy should recognise youth as active partners in building safer, resilient, sustainable communities.

***Keywords**: Youth Empowerment, Disaster Risk Reduction, Community Resilience, Community-Based Disaster Risk Management, Sustainability*

Introduction

Disasters have become more frequent, complex, and damaging in a world shaped by climate change, environmental degradation, unplanned urbanisation, and widening social inequalities (UNDRR, 2015; NDMA, 2024). Their consequences extend beyond immediate loss of life and infrastructure damage to include displacement, livelihood disruption, health risks, educational interruption, psychosocial stress, and long-term developmental setbacks (WHO, 2024). Developing countries often face

[1] Suchita Kanoo, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work,, Assam University, Silchar.

[2] Dr. Joyashri Dey Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work at Assam University, Silchar.

[3] Gitanjali Sharma, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar.

[4] Bidisha Deka, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar.

disproportionate impacts because structural vulnerabilities, weak public systems, and limited preparedness capacities reduce their ability to anticipate and recover from hazards effectively (NDMA, 2024).

In response to these challenges, global and national disaster policies increasingly emphasise prevention, preparedness, local participation, and community resilience. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 identifies understanding risk, strengthening governance, investing in resilience, and enhancing preparedness as core priorities for action (UNDRR, 2015). Similarly, the National Disaster Management Authority in India highlights the importance of active community involvement and recognises communities as the first responders in many disaster situations (NDMA, 2024). These perspectives indicate that disaster risk reduction cannot depend solely on external agencies or post-disaster interventions. Instead, it must involve organised local participation and context-specific planning.

Among the many actors within communities, youth represent a particularly important constituency. Young people often possess social energy, creativity, technological competence, adaptability, and strong peer networks that can be mobilised in support of disaster preparedness and resilience-building (UNDRR, 2020; WHO, 2024). They are connected to schools, neighbourhoods, online spaces, and civic networks that make them effective channels for communication, awareness, and mobilisation. Yet youth are often positioned as passive victims of disaster rather than as active contributors to prevention and preparedness (UNDRR, 2020). This gap between policy recognition and practical inclusion weakens disaster governance and limits opportunities for building resilient communities.

From a social work perspective, the issue is especially relevant because disaster vulnerability is deeply linked with inequality, exclusion, participation deficits, and fragile community systems. Social work prioritises empowerment, inclusion, participation, rights, and community organisation, all of which align closely with community-based disaster risk reduction (NDMA, 2024). Youth engagement in DRR should therefore be understood not only as a technical strategy but also as a question of democratic participation, social justice, and sustainable community development. When youth are trained, trusted, and institutionally included, they can contribute to safer communities while also strengthening civic responsibility and collective resilience (WHO, 2024; NDMA, 2024).

This paper aims to examine the role of youth in community disaster risk reduction and to build a conceptual framework explaining how youth engagement can strengthen resilience. It proposes four interrelated pillars of youth participation: youth empowerment, community-based disaster risk management, youth leadership, and sustainability. By organising the discussion through these pillars, the paper seeks to present a stronger and more analytically grounded manuscript.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the role of youth in Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction through a review of existing policy frameworks and literature.
2. To design and develop a conceptual framework explaining how youth empowerment, community-based disaster risk management, youth leadership, and sustainability contribute to strengthening community disaster resilience.

Synthesis of Literatures

Youth Participation in Disaster Risk Reduction

Young people show up in disaster research now less as passive victims, more as active contributors. Not just protected but shaping safety strategies alongside adults, with weight behind collective effort, the Sendai Framework pushes broad inclusion when managing crisis risks (UNDRR, 2015). Because of this direction, later advice from UNDRR stresses how children and teens' roles must reflect their rights, include diverse voices, respond to gender dynamics, and fit real-life growth phases (UNDRR, 2020). Once seen as token involvement, youth input now anchors practical readiness, local strength, and lasting decision systems.

Evidence shows youth involvement improves disaster risk reduction through distinct pathways. Schools, online spaces, and local connections give young individuals access points for spreading awareness, teaching peers, sharing alerts, gathering volunteers, or reaching residents (UNDRR, 2020; WHO, 2024). Because digital systems respond quickly to their input, these participants fit well in situations where fast updates lower danger (Sudorgin & Agafonov, 2024). Openness to new ideas and group efforts often mark younger populations, qualities that boost readiness at community levels while inviting wider public engagement. A key example comes from Pickering et al. (2022), who found tools such as Photo voice enable adolescents to document risks using images, sending clear messages straight to decision makers, reshaping platforms once seen as purely social into channels with practical safety roles.

Young voices add value simply by seeing things differently when it comes to handling disasters. What they go through, interrupted schooling, unstable healthcare, broken friendships, uncertainty about what comes next, offers clues that older planners tend to miss (UNICEF, 2021). Far from passive, studies show teens grasp the layers of being ready, not just supplies but trust, communication, adaptability and shape conversations around how communities bounce back (Bell et al., 2024). Yet connection matters: without bridges between informal youth hubs and official crisis systems, energy dissipates (MacDonald et al., 2023), because isolated efforts cannot sustain change.

Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM)

Disasters strike and those living in affected areas usually act fast before outside help arrives. Local insights shape how risks get spotted, studied, tracked, managed, and reviewed, according to NDMA (2024). Because people understand their surroundings in ways experts might miss, involving those changes outcomes. Rather than waiting for orders, residents take initiative during crises, influencing recovery speed. Decision processes that include voices from the ground tend to fit actual needs better. Agency lies within neighbourhoods themselves, not just institutions sending aid. Preparedness grows stronger when planning includes lived experience alongside data. As frontline actors, locals impact how well responses work overall (NDMA, 2024).

Most studies agree: involving communities improves how well disaster programs fit actual needs, builds trust, and lasts over the long-term. Because residents take part in identifying risks, mapping the weak points, setting goals, and shaping readiness steps, DRR efforts match real-life conditions more closely while staying active longer (NDMA, 2024).Yusrinawati & Damayanti (2024) show that places where people feel responsible for safety recover faster after major floods, both economically and physically. Yet despite these benefits, relying on local action does not remove duties from official agencies. Working well together, local authorities, schools, medical services, non-profits, plus official emergency bodies are key to strong CBDRR (MacDonald et al., 2023; NDMA, 2024).

Youth Leadership and Community Resilience

One idea often found in studies about young people and disaster preparedness is building leadership. Rather than focusing only on official roles, this concept covers skills like guiding peer groups, sharing hazard information, sparking joint responses, voicing community concerns, and bridging gaps between locals and organisations. According to UNDRR (2020), youth must speak up and take initiative during crises. In contrast, WHO (2024) stresses making space for them in shaping resilient systems. Training focused on practical abilities, such as logistics or trades, can shift their role from passive helpers to key organisers, as pointed out by Sharif & Othman (2024). Sudorgin & Agafonov (2024) show that digital tools are reshaping how young leaders operate, allowing quick outreach among peers online. These fast-moving connections now support instant warnings and timely deployment of aid teams.

Sustainability and Long-Term Resilience

Sustainability is closely linked climate adaptations and environmental protection. Sustainability gains depth when efforts like CBDRR align with broader societal goals. This connection surfaces clearly in NDMA's 2024 analysis. Because breakdowns in ecosystems often feed into crises, underlying issues such as unfair resource access or failing infrastructure matter deeply (UNDP, 2022). Ziwanai in 2024 frames them as enduring links between heritage practices and updated local training systems, especially in remote areas, and found that when young populations face climate

stress, their emotional well-being shapes collective strength.Murphy et al. (2020) found that youth engagement in climate adaptation supports psychological resilience.

Methodology

Research Design

This work uses a qualitative approach focused on ideas, drawing from already published materials instead of gathering new information through surveys or interviews. Its aim lies in reviewing and pulling together current insights about young people's roles in local efforts to reduce disaster risks. Because the goal involves exploring perspectives rather than running experiments, a framework centred on concepts fits well. Such an approach supports looking at varied opinions, weighing established findings, spotting patterns across studies, while forming a clearer picture of how youth help strengthen community resilience when disasters strike.

Sources of Data

Secondary data forms the foundation of this research, drawn exclusively from trustworthy outlets. Journal articles that underwent peer review appear among the sources examined. Reports issued by global institutions contributed key information. Policy papers tied to reducing disaster risks informed parts of the analysis.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), along with material issued by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) contributed key insights, just as did the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Publications from UNICEF also formed part of the foundation, together with documents produced by respected groups active in disaster response and local progress. Selection leaned heavily on how current each document was, given their grounding in verified findings about young people's involvement. Governance during emergencies shaped another core theme present across chosen texts. Resilience strategies appeared consistently, especially where communities took initiative. Sustainable pathways emerged often, particularly when long-term planning entered the discussion.

Literature Search and Selection

Searching began through digital libraries and verified institutional pages. The literature was searched using Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and official websites of UNDRR, WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, and NDMA. The process included cross-checking sources listed on UNDRR’s web portal.

Starting with terms like youth and disaster risk reduction, the process pulled together studies across fields. Though focused on community resilience, it also looked at how young people contribute through volunteer work. Because varied phrases were tested, results included research on local decision-making and readiness efforts.

Although the analysis centered on sources from 2020 to 2026, aiming at fresh insights into disaster preparedness and young people's roles, earlier key documents appeared too. The inclusion of guiding texts like the Sendai Framework 2015-2030 happened due to lasting significance rather than recency.

Some of what made it into the review focused strictly on young people's involvement, local-level disaster preparedness, resilience strategies, or connected policy systems. Those left out were papers lacking clear connection, repeated findings, viewpoints missing data, or written in languages other than English.

Data Analysis

The selected literature was analysed using thematic analysis. Studies were read repeatedly to identify recurring concepts, similarities, and differences. Four major themes emerged: youth empowerment, community-based disaster risk reduction, youth leadership, and sustainability.

Four key ideas shaped the framework introduced here. Beyond that, the study pointed out shared obstacles to real youth engagement, few chances to influence choices, symbolic roles without power, weak backing from institutions, disjointed efforts between groups involved, along with a lack of funds and practical know-how.

Putting the results into perspective meant aligning them with core ideas in social work, active involvement at the neighbourhood level, while also considering how communities bounce back after crises. This helped clarify how young people contribute to lowering disaster risks where they live. Despite varying approaches across regions, one thing remains clear: youth engagement shapes local preparedness in tangible ways that fit within broader support systems.

Conceptual Framework of Youth Engagement in Disaster Risk Reduction

Looking at past studies, this work introduces an idea about how young people might play a real role in local efforts to reduce disaster risks. Centered on four connected ideas empowerment of youth, locally led risk strategies, leadership by young individuals, and long-term impact the model takes shape. One element feeds into another, even if each stands apart in function. Resilience grows stronger when these parts operate as a unit, shaped by active involvement from younger members of communities.

Most studies agree that young people contribute best when their role extends past just showing up after a crisis hits. Knowledge grows stronger through practice; this means they require real chances to learn by doing, gain leadership experience, and take on responsibilities in local organisations (UNDRR, 2020; Fourie & Terblanche-Greeff, 2021; WHO, 2024).Without access to proper instruction, backing from established groups, or seats at discussion tables, efforts to include them tend to look involved while actually remaining shallow (MacDonald et al., 2023). Seen this way,

adolescents must shift from being viewed purely as recipients toward becoming active collaborators across all stages of handling disasters.

The Four Pillars of Youth Engagement in Disaster Risk Reduction

1. Youth Empowerment

Starting with youth who have driven but lack the know-how, ability, self-assurance, and backing from systems, real involvement falls apart. Research across studies shows a pattern in which younger individuals bring drive, inventive thinking, tech familiarity, and wide peer ties, yet such qualities reduce disaster risks only if nurtured well (UNDRR, 2020; WHO, 2024). Starting with hands-on skills sets the foundation for real empowerment. Research shows that teaching youth first aid, safe evacuation, search and rescue, urgent communication, and emotional support boosts their readiness (WHO, 2021; WHO, 2024; NDMA, 2024). Additionally, a mix of digital abilities and young people's engagement grows stronger. Since many young people already spend time online, their presence offers a path to spreading timely alerts, circulating accurate updates, and slowing false claims across different platforms and local groups (Sudorgin & Agafonov, 2024;Pickering et al., 2022; UNDRR, 2020). Digital literacy also requires the ability to identify misinformation and communicate reliable warnings

Civic awareness stands out as a key part of empowerment, through educational institutes, student groups, local clubs, and neighbourhood networks. Outreach efforts frame readiness not just as personal duty but as collective engagement.

Still, research shows while youth value is acknowledged in various policy frameworks, meaningful opportunities to engage deeply often go missing across different areas. Emergencies see young individuals called upon to help, yet their voices seldom shape plans or choices (MacDonald et al., 2023). The outcome is clear: building skills alone falls short unless paired with inclusion, mutual accountability, and space within community-level crisis leadership.

2. Community-Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM)

Young people gain real opportunities to act when disaster planning grows from within neighborhoods. While standard methods depend heavily on aid groups arriving after crises, this model treats residents as essential collaborators aware of hazards, assets, and weak points in ways distant experts cannot match (NDMA, 2024).

Young individuals bring useful insights into local hazard mapping through their daily experiences across classrooms, residential areas, and online platforms. Their familiarity with surroundings helps spot at-risk homes, paths for safe movement during emergencies, zones likely to flood, weak points in information sharing, along with existing support systems within communities. While official bodies rely on structured data, these contributions align closely with real-life conditions observed firsthand. Such awareness emerges naturally when youth engage routinely in multiple

social environments and knowledge gained informally adds depth to formal evaluations led by authorities.

Young people matter just as much when communities practice for crises through fire drills, classroom safety lessons, public alerts, or local response planning (WHO, 2024). Because of their involvement, messages travel more clearly, neighbors work together better, yet families start getting ready long before danger arrives instead of waiting until it's too late. Young volunteer groups strengthen community participation and preparedness (Yusrinawati & Damayanti, 2024). Because they connect easily with friends and relatives, their engagement tends to spark broader involvement, while acting locally, these efforts ripple outward energising neighbours who might otherwise stay distant and motivation spreads when youth take initiative, quietly reshaping how communities prepare together.

3. Youth Leadership

Young people stepping into leadership often do much beyond official titles, organising teams of volunteers' forms one piece of their role, while sharing vital updates during crises shows another path they take. Problem-solving within neighborhoods emerges naturally from their efforts, just as speaking up for those who struggle to be heard becomes part of daily work. Connecting local residents with larger organisations happens quietly but consistently across settings. Such actions turn personal involvement into shared progress shaping outcomes wider than any single person could achieve alone.

One way to build such skills lies in steady support for training leaders, when instruction covers how to talk clearly, work in groups, handle disagreements, make choices under pressure, and prepare for emergencies, teens gain confidence taking on real tasks in local crisis efforts (Sharif & Othman, 2024). Another path emerges through digital tools these boost young organisers by speeding up alerts, gathering helpers fast, spreading knowledge online (Sudorgin & Agafonov, 2024). It is clear from existing studies that young people's voices matter when shaping public decisions. Because they speak up, topics like secure learning environments, fair disaster responses, care for nature, and support for vulnerable groups gain visibility and when these emerging leaders take part, conversations grow richer adding views usually missing in plans made mostly by adults.

Still, chances to lead do not reach every young person the same way and when gaps tied to schooling, identity, background, or location go unnoticed, many youths get left out of shaping choices. If nothing shifts those roadblocks, leadership efforts might serve just a few who already hold advantages. However, its seen that the access stays possible only when someone actively keeps paths open across different parts of community life.

4. Sustainability

Resilience over time ties closely to how young people get involved. Research repeatedly shows disaster planning works best when treated as ongoing, rather than

limited to crises. This approach links naturally with local growth efforts, care for ecosystems, and adjusting to changing climate patterns (NDMA, 2024; UNDP, 2022). Sustainability becomes real through steady engagement, not isolated actions. With rising global temperatures, extreme weather events occur more often and hit harder. Because of this shift, planning matters now more than at any point before, and young individuals stand to become key voices in shaping resilient communities. Youth contribute to climate adaptation through environmental awareness, a fforestation, waste management, water conservation, and disaster education.

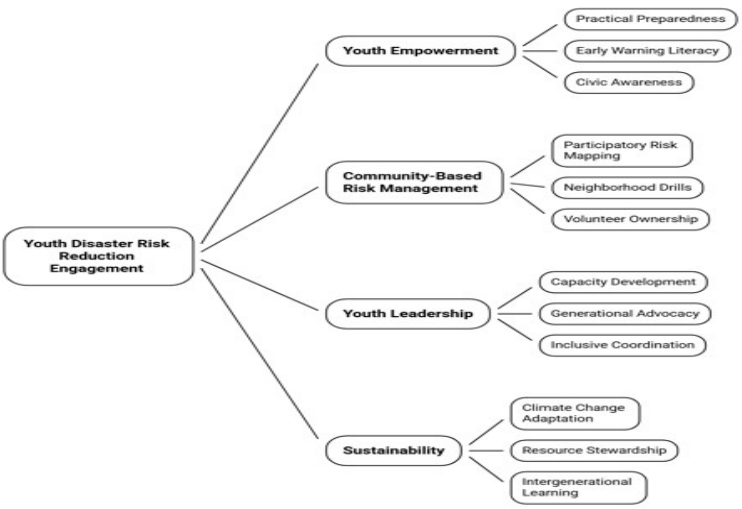
Continuity within institutions tends to matter more than isolated initiatives when it comes to keeping young people involved over time. Programs like school-based disaster clubs or recurring community drills offer steady involvement, local collaborations such as those linking youth volunteers with municipal agencies, play a role too. These structures sustain attention to disasters even when crises are not immediate (WHO, 2024).

Young people offer fresh ideas, along with tech know-how, whereas elders share time-tested wisdom, regional insights, and long-standing survival methods, and together a mix of both generations strengthens how groups handle evolving threats (Ziwanai, 2024). Even so, numerous programs aimed at young people only last as long as external funding is available, and because of this pattern, research indicates that lasting impact depends on steady backing from institutions, supportive policies, ongoing skill development, and real involvement by local communities instead of short-lived efforts.

Figure 1

Youth Disaster Risk Reduction Engagement Framework

Source: Created by the researcher, adapted from UNDRR (2020), WHO (2024), and NDMA (2024).



Discussion and Findings

The review indicates that young people bring real strength to local disaster efforts once given genuine roles in planning, reacting, rebuilding, and growing collective readiness over time. Far from passive recipients, studies show youth stepping into key functions, spreading alerts, rallying volunteers, guiding safety talks, leading drills, shaping warnings, and even taking charge where communities need direction (UNDRR, 2020; WHO, 2024; NDMA, 2024). Instead of focusing solely on emergencies, they engage in tasks like identifying local hazards, shaping readiness strategies, raising ecological understanding, supporting adjustments to shifting climates, and speaking up for those often overlooked. Earlier research supports this pattern, showing resilience grows stronger when locals take part actively, sharing duties instead of depending entirely on outside help (MacDonald et al., 2023; Yusrinawati & Damayanti, 2024).

Still, findings show that even when youth are highlighted in official guidelines, real involvement often falls short. Despite mentions in global agreements like the Sendai Framework and various national strategies, the youngest individuals take part mainly in outreach events or crisis moments. Their voices rarely shape preparation stages, leadership choices, or rule creation (UNDRR, 2015; UNDRR, 2020; Pickering et al., 2022;). Behind stated goals lies a persistent mismatch common at local levels of tackling disaster risks. Support in terms of funding or expertise tends to be thin or inconsistent across programs. Communication gaps between organisations further weaken efforts meant to include younger voices; the missing altogether in many cases are official channels through which youth can formally join decision-making around disasters (MacDonald et al., 2023; NDMA, 2024). As a result, projects driven by young people struggle to last or make a real impact.

Table 1.

Major Barriers to Youth Participation in Disaster Risk Reduction

Barrier	***Impact on Youth Participation***	***Suggested Strategy***
Tokenistic participation	Youth are consulted but excluded from planning and decision-making processes.	Ensure formal representation of youth in local disaster management committees and community planning bodies.
Resource limitations	Limited funding, training, equipment, and technical support reduce the effectiveness and continuity of youth initiatives.	Allocate dedicated financial resources, regular capacity-building programmes, and logistical support for youth-led activities.
Institutional fragmentation	Weak coordination among schools, community	Develop formal partnerships, clearly define institutional

	organisations, NGOs, local authorities, and disaster management agencies results in duplication of efforts and unclear roles.	responsibilities, and strengthen inter-agency coordination.

Effective youth engagement rests on three main factors: ongoing skill development, official acknowledgement, and sufficient funding. Over time, consistent backing financial, technical, structural keeps this role active (UNDRR, 2020; WHO, 2024; NDMA, 2024).

Youth empowerment builds awareness and self-assurance among young individuals; meanwhile, Community-Based Disaster Risk Management opens pathways for involvement. Leadership abilities deepen group efforts when nurtured early. Long-lasting community strength depends heavily on continuity over time. If one piece falters, results across all areas tend to decline, and support found here aligns well with earlier ideas put forward.

Implications for Social Work Practice

This review has importance implications for social work. At the time of crisis, gaps between people tend to widen so involving communities becomes a necessity rather than an option. Because young people, households, institutions, and officials rarely align on their own, skilled facilitators help bridge these spaces. Resilience grows where coordination takes root, especially when trust forms across different levels of society.

Starting with small steps, social workers set up community groups where young people take part in real decisions. Instead of waiting, they run drills and teach how to prepare when disasters strike. Skills like speaking clearly or leading a team grow through practice, guided quietly by professionals. Participation becomes possible when planning sessions include voices often left out. Marginalised youth find space when efforts are made to bring them into safety programs. Working together across age lines, young individuals connect with city offices and aid organisations.

Policy Implications

Young people's involvement in reducing disaster risks demands stronger policy backing, as the analysis shows. Despite being acknowledged within global and country-level plans; real engagement still falls short too often. Turning promises into concrete steps inside institutions requires more focused work, it seems clear.

Young people ought to have a seat on local disaster planning panels, one report notes. Through volunteer groups led by peers, their involvement gains structure. Training sessions focused on emergencies and guiding others help build practical abilities.

Support must come through funding that matches the scale of youth-driven projects. Instead of working in isolation, educational institutions could link up with neighbourhood associations. Non-profit organisations play a role when they team up with city councils.

Conclusion

This paper shows how youth bring real value to community efforts in reducing disaster risks, because they possess energy, know local conditions well, use technology skilfully, and can lead. Young individuals help strengthen readiness, actions during crises, healing afterwards, and ongoing safety within communities (UNDRR, 2020; WHO, 2024). Still, structural barriers tend to hold back their full involvement and support from institutions remains weak; tools and funding are lacking, while space for genuine influence in shaping plans and choices stays narrow (NDMA, 2024; UNDRR, 2020).

A setup built on empowerment, local-led disaster planning, leadership chances for youth, and long-term thinking helps communities bounce back better. Energy from young leaders grows where inclusion is real. Resilience takes shape not just through effort, but through space made available. Because of this, communities become better prepared before disasters strike. Over time, shared responsibility leads to more adaptable recovery efforts. Real involvement, not token roles, makes these changes possible.

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Occupational Hazards & Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities of Married Women in the Agri-Fishery Sector: Evidence from South 24 Parganas District of Sundarbans

Moumee Jesmin[1]
Dr. Rupa Biswas[2]

Abstract

The study explores the marriage of occupational hazards with reproductive health vulnerabilities of married women in the agri-fishery sector.100 married females were selected from seven blocks of South 24 Parganas district in the Sundarbans area of West Bengal.The findings reveal that there are a lot of vulnerabilities related to reproductive health, as 67% of the respondents stated they have had urinary tract infections (UTIs).Their occupations involved exposure to saline water every day for 2–4 hours and these conditions were associated.Policy recommendations are the introduction of mobile boat clinics and community-based health education program to address the mismatch between the reproductive health needs and alternative livelihood generating activities particularly for these women and strengthening of SHGs of married women who are engaged in agri-fishery based activities with linkages to access to essential reproductive health services.

Keywords: *Occupational Hazard, Reproductive Health Vulnerabilities, Married Women, Agri-fishery Sector*

Introduction

Sundarban delta along the Bay of Bengal border of West Bengal is one of the most ecologically vulnerable and socially deprived areas of India. There are seven blocks in South 24 Parganas District (Patharpratima, Sagar, Namkhana, Gosaba, Basanti, Kakdwip and Kultali), where the people's livelihood is very much associated with saline water environments. In all these women in marriage, they have to perform agri-fishery labour tasks meaning they are exposed to brackish water for long periods without wearing the protective equipment and have no sanitary and health facilities.Work-related reproductive impacts, alongside with poverty, low education and climatic vulnerability, is a structural health emergency which is largely neglected in national reproductive health surveillance. Primary quantitative data was collected to understand the particular burden of reproductive health vulnerabilities and occupational hazards from 100 respondents from each of the 7 blocks in South 24 Parganas.

[1] Moumee Jesmin, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata

[2] Dr. Rupa Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Work, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata, Email- swjesmin95@gmail.com

Literature Review

Studies published reveal that women in the coastal regions relying on agriculture and marine resources in the Sundarban region of India and Bangladesh are exposed to occupational hazards and environmental dangers all of which are impacting their reproductive health between 2015 and 2025. The latest, direct evidence of occupational exposure with saline water and reproductive health outcome is the cross-sectional study conducted by Hossain and Pal (2025) in the ecologically contiguous Sundarban Region of Bangladesh in the union of Gabura in the district of Satkhira. Among the 234 women of reproductive age studied, 68.8% were reported to have reproductive problems like leucorrhoea, dysmenorrhea, irregular menstruation, dysuria and miscarriage. Reproductive morbidity was significantly associated with water-dependent occupations (OR 3.916, $p < 0.001$) which indicates that agri-fishery labor is not only correlated with reproductive morbidity, it is also causally causing reproductive morbidity. The authors proposed mobile health clinics and water filters as problem-specific solutions (Hossain & Pal, 2025). These work risks are exacerbated by climate change. In particular, two studies in 2025 in the Annals of Global Health record the impacts of cyclones in the Indian Sundarbans. A parallel study revealed the disease prevalence in blocks of Sundarban with water borne diseases was significantly higher in cyclonic years which created extra burden for women working in flood and tidal surge water (Annals of Global Health, 2025). Similarly, Roy et al. (2025) found cultural norms, family support (by mother-in-law), insufficient supplementation with iron and folic acid, and the weaknesses of the health system to be converging factors that lead to poor reproductive health-seeking behavior in similar rural contexts in West Bengal. The present study data from South 24 Parganas shows that the stigma and male gatekeeping of health decisions aligns with the findings of the present study. Basic research within the Sundarbans and similar Indian settings is also important to capture baseline data. In the Indian study setting, Dasgupta, Wheeler, and Ghosh (2022) reported significant differences in the rates of self-reported health problems among women who use salt water for cooking and residing in the Sundarbans, specifically showing that self-reported health problems were significantly higher among those who encounter saline water for prolonged periods, particularly those engaged in fishing. This is further validated by the record of severe anemia reported by Panda et al. (2016) in more than 40% of women in five villages of Patharpratima block, which also had the highest sub-sample in the present study. Biswas (2013) laid a groundwork of high maternal and child mortality in Sundarbans islands, which he argued was due to isolation, underdeveloped infrastructure and failure to respond by the government. In the South Indian region, Gopalakrishnan et al. (2019) showed that 67% of women were affected by gynecological issues, with women from the economically deprived group most likely to be affected by UTI and Reproductive Tract Infections (RTIs). Ghule et al. (2015) and Paul (2022) reported the negative role of contraceptive decision-making by husbands and absence of women's reproductive autonomy in increasing the health risks for rural women's reproductive health. Sarkar et al. (2015) pointed out the importance of community-based reproductive health interventions in resource-limited

environments. Together, this evidence places the present findings in an established context of reproductive health disadvantage, which is structural, intersectional, and targets that can be addressed systemically.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the prevalence of reproductive health vulnerabilities among married agri-fishery women workers in the selected blocks of South 24 Parganas, with particular attention to occupational and livelihood-related determinants.
- To suggest measures for evidence based policy formulation and social work intervention.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive research design. The respondents comprised married women of reproductive age (18 to 49 years) engaged in agri-fishery livelihoods and residing in seven climate hotspot coastal blocks of South 24 Parganas District: Patharpratima, Sagar, Namkhana, Gosaba, Basanti, Kakdwip, and Kultali of Sundarbans. These blocks were selected on the basis of their coastal hazard exposure, ecological vulnerability, and the prevalence of agri-fishery livelihoods among women. A total of 100 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. Inclusion criteria included currently married status, residence in the block for at least 5 years, engagement in agri-fishery work. Data was collected through a structured interview schedule. Ethical protocols including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were strictly adhered throughout.

Results

Socio- Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The study surveyed 100 women engaged in agri-fishery livelihoods across seven blocks of South 24 Parganas in the Sundarbans delta region. The socio-economic profile presented below captures key demographic, educational, social, economic, and occupational characteristics of the sample, providing a comprehensive contextual backdrop for understanding reproductive health outcomes in this ecologically vulnerable and economically marginalized population.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N=100)

Variables	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Respondents from the 7 district of South 24 Parganas	100	100%
Age Group (Years)		
18–25	17	17%
26–33	31	31%
34–41	26	26%
42–49	26	26%
Educational Attainment		
Primary	31	31%
Secondary	34	34%
Graduation	35	35%
Age at Marriage (Years)		
18–20	52	52%
21–23	48	48%
Family Structure		
Joint	54	54%
Nuclear	46	46%
Number of Children		
One	32	32%
Two	52	52%
Three	16	16%
Caste Category		
Scheduled Tribe (ST)	36	36%
Scheduled Caste (SC)	34	34%
Other Backward Class (OBC)	30	30%
Monthly Household Income (Rs.)		

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below Rs. 10,000	90	90%
Rs. 20,000–30,000	10	10%
Occupational Profile		
Agri-fishery livelihood	100	100%
Saline water exposure (2–4 hrs/day)	100	100%
Government Scheme Coverage		
SwasthyaSathi	71	71%
Total	100	100%

Reproductive Health Concerns and Occupational Hazards

All 100 respondents reported experiencing menstrual health problems, establishing a condition of universal menstrual morbidity in this population. Among sanitary product use, 51% continued to use cloth and 49% used sanitary napkins. Cloth use in the context of absent or inadequate sanitation infrastructure, contaminated pond water used for washing, and limited privacy at work and home creates a direct pathway to reproductive tract infections. 47% percent of respondents did not consult a doctor for their menstrual concerns despite universal symptom prevalence, reflecting the operation of stigma, cost, and distance as compounded barriers.

Urinary Tract Infection Prevalence

UTI was confirmed in 67% of respondents. An additional 25% were unaware of their UTI status, representing a substantial undiagnosed burden likely attributable to low health literacy regarding genitourinary symptoms and limited diagnostic access. Only 8% were confirmed UTI-free. This prevalence significantly exceeds the national community UTI average of 15 to 25% in non-hospitalized populations (ICMR, 2019). The elevated South 24 Parganas rate reflects the compounded effect of longer agri-fishery exposure hours, more remote health infrastructure, greater pond water dependence for bathing, and higher toilet non-availability.

Table 2: UTI Prevalence Among Respondents (N=100)

UTI Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Confirmed UTI	67	67%
Unaware of UTI Status	25	25%
Confirmed UTI-Free	8	8%
Total	100	100%

Pregnancy-Related and Reproductive Health Complications

Among respondents with pregnancy experience, anemia was reported by 56% and malnutrition by 44%. These conditions are structurally linked: chronic saline water exposure, physically demanding agri-fishery labor, poor dietary diversity, and inadequate iron-folic acid supplementation collectively create a severe nutritional and hematological deficit during pregnancy. Miscarriage was reported by 31% of respondents, a rate substantially higher than global averages and consistent with the reproductive toxicology literature on heavy physical labor during pregnancy combined with chronic anemia. Climate disasters were confirmed to affect healthcare access by all 100 respondents (100%), confirming the total disruption of health service availability during cyclonic events.

Table 3: Key Reproductive Health Indicators (N=100)

Reproductive Health Indicator	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Menstrual health problems reported	100	100%
Use cloth for sanitary protection	51	51%
Use sanitary napkins	49	49%
Did not consult a doctor for menstrual concerns	47	47%
Anemia during pregnancy	56	56%
Malnutrition during pregnancy	44	44%
Miscarriage reported	31	31%
Climate disasters affected healthcare access	100	100%

Occupational Hazard and Livelihood

All 100 respondents (100%) identified their work as constituting an occupational hazard. Of those 71% considered long working hours and physically stressful postures as their main occupational risk, and 29% saw direct saline water exposure as the dominant hazard.In reality, both hazards are present in shrimp aquaculture and paddy fields, where women have long periods of time under water and are required to adopt a bent posture, which merges into mechanical prerequisites for urinary and reproductive tract pathology.At worksites, where there are no protective garments, waterproof aprons, or rest intervals, all found hazards are present and not mitigated for throughout the working day.

Discussion

Two facets of this discussion part were considered. 1. Socio-economic & Demographic Profile 2. Prevalence of reproductive health problems in relation to the reproductive risks of the married agri-fishery women workers. The highest epidemiologically significant result in this study is the UTI rate (67%) among respondents from South 24 Parganas. In a similar population in coastal Bangladesh, Hossain and Pal (2025) reported reproductive health problem rate of 68.8% and found water-dependent occupation was a strong independent risk factor (OR 3.916; $p<0.001$).This cross-national convergence indicates that a cross-national convergence in the occupational-UTI nexus is not a locally idiosyncratic phenomenon but a systematic and replicable one in saline water agri-fishery contexts. The proportion who responded that they were unaware of their UTI status (25%) also suggests a proportion that may be undiagnosed and that is an area that community-level screening program need to address. The sanitary product situation further exacerbates the problem of menstrual health. The almost equal distribution between cloth (51%) and napkins (49%) in South 24 Parganas indicates a partial transition, whereas for most of the population using cloth, the lack of clean water for washing and drying, along with exposure to contaminated pond water and saline water, exposes them to a close microbiological link to reproductive tract infection. From the broader Sundarbans study (Jesmin & Biswas, 2026). This is supported by Amin et al (2025) who reported that women are deprived of access to sanitation facilities in cyclone-affected coastal Bangladesh especially during menstrual periods. The Sundarbans sub-population is a largely ST and SC women with income. The findings of Roy et al. (2025) in Bankura District, West Bengal, support the results presented here: cultural norms, the dysfunction of family decision-making, and health system shortcomings all contribute to limiting women's access to reproductive health services. The data indicated that 71% of respondents considered poor posture and long working hours as the greatest hazard and 29% of respondents considered direct exposure to saline as the greatest hazard.The present study's findings on UTI and menstrual problems among the women of the Sundarban area should be interpreted in the context of the results obtained by Dasgupta, Wheeler and Ghosh (2022) who indicated saline water occupational exposure as a significant predictor of self-reported gynecological illness of these women in regression analysis. Lack of occupational safety laws to make special precautions for women involved in agri-fishery activities about the hazards to their reproductive system is a failure in policy. The lack of specific laws that provide protection for the potential hazards to women's reproductive system in agri-fishery is a failure in policy, which cannot be overcome by individual health awareness program.

Suggestions

Mobile health clinics staffed by female health workers need to be deployed regularly across all seven study blocks with boat-based clinics to be deployed in island areas, to

conduct UTI and RTI screening, menstrual health consultations and to distribute free sanitary pads. Water for washing hands, enclosed drying places and clean toilet facilities are essential for the worksites and enforced by the panchayats as it is a labor requirement and a public health need. Prevention of saline water contact with the reproductive tract should be minimized by providing women in agri-fishery activities with suitable waterproof lower-body garments either via the government or CSR. Male engagement programs at the community-level are key to respond to the situation of spouse-dominated health decision making. Menstrual health and obstetric health should be part of all district disaster management and cyclone shelter plans as an essential component of the infrastructure.

Avenues for further research

This study has a cross-sectional design and cannot determine temporal relationships between exposure and health outcomes. Because of the purposive sampling method, the results from the study cannot be generalized to the larger population in the Sundarbans. The participants were not clinically diagnosed as having a UTI or not, and this may have resulted in recall bias. The sample size of 100 was adequate for descriptive analysis purposes, however, was not large when compared to the total number of blocks in the study. Absence of a control group, however, does not permit one to make direct comparison with non-agri-fishery women.In the future, a large number of longitudinal designs with clinical confirmation of the status of UTI and reproductive tract infection would significantly improve the evidence base.

Conclusion

The present study is therefore, based on the structural crisis of the reproductive health of married women in agri-fishery in South 24 Parganas Sundarbans.Menstrual morbidity is universal, the burden of UTIs is high, rates of miscarriage frequently occur, and provision of health care is almost always limited and inaccessible during time of climate disaster – these are all the predictable consequences of a health care system that sets the burden of reproductive health at women's doorstep and denies them occupational protections and access to health care and autonomy in decision making to manage it.The findings are part of a national and international evidence base being collected over 2015-25 which draws attention to the necessity of reproductive health not only as a health issue, but as a climate and labour rights issue, in the Indian Sundarbans.The strength and resilience of these women must not be a justification for continued neglect – it is the most compelling reason for immediate and systemic action.

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Gender Inequality, Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience: A Comparative Gender Perspective Study of India, Japan and Barak Valley Region of Assam, India in Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5

Prof. Ankur Saxena[1]
Chandani Barman[2]

Abstract

Gender inequality is still a major obstacle to reaching Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which focuses on women's empowerment and gender equality, even though both India and Japan have made impressive economic growth. With an emphasis on agricultural growth in India, the study investigates the socioeconomic variables, cultural influences, policy initiatives, and climate change adaptation measures that contribute to gender differences in both nations. Gender disparities persist in areas like workplace participation, social status, and opportunities for women, despite India's significant economic development of about 6-7% per year. Research conducted with women agricultural workers in the Barak Valley districts of Assam, the findings revealed significant economic and cultural barriers, including limited opportunities for indigenous and traditional women farmers, and wage inequality. Further Climate change also intensifies these challenges by decreasing agricultural productivity and weakening adaptive capacity. Similarly, Japan's modern infrastructure, economic advancement, cultural expectations and institutional barriers continue to restricts women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles. To achieve gender equality society requires inclusive policies, social change, and better opportunities for women in education, employment, governance, and climate resilience initiatives.

Keywords: *Gender Equality, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), Women Empowerment, Climate Resilience, Agricultural Development.*

1. Introduction

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) wish to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" by 2030, recognizing gender equality as a fundamental human right and an important pillar for a peaceful, successful, and sustainable society. In the human society agriculture plays an important role, it is an important sector for food security and economic development. Agriculture provides a place for growth and development supporting to attaining

[1] Prof. Ankur Saxena Head, Faculty of Social Work, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. Email ID - ankur.a.saxena@gmail.com, Contact no - 9427062771

[2] Chandani Barman, PhD Research Scholar, Faculty of Social Work, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat. E-mail: chandani123barman@gmail.com, Contact no - 8638128825

SDG 5, especially in areas where it is the primary source of income. However, gender inequality in agriculture limits women's chances and contributions, restricting progress towards this aim. The study compares gender inequalities in India, Japan, and the Barak Valley region of Assam, India. It investigates the socioeconomic and cultural factors contributing to gender disparities in the regions under study, focusing on areas such as education, labour market involvement, salary differences, political representation, and cultural norms. By analysing with SDG 5, the study aims to highlight on the difficulties and potential for attaining gender equality in agriculture, providing insights for policymakers and stakeholders.

Despite economic progress, India and Japan still facing gender inequality, particularly in employment and political participation. Japan, on the other hand is one of the world's greatest economies, has high gender inequalities in terms of economic involvement and opportunity. Women in Japan continue to face significant barriers to career advancement and leadership opportunities, and the Japan continues to witness low female parliamentary representation rates 11.8% in 2024 to 8.5% in 2025 (Gender Equality Bureau Cabinet Office, 2021; Global Gender Gap Report, 2025).

In contrast, India ranked 140th among 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 and hiked to 127th among 146 countries in 2023, although disparities continue across economic participation, education, health, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2021; 2023). India again shows lower rank down to 131st country out of 148 countries (World Economic Forum, 2025). These differences are emphasized by sociocultural norms and traditional gender roles, particularly in rural areas where women often lack access to healthcare and education, limiting their opportunities for economic empowerment and independence (UNICEF, 2019; UN Women, 2022).

Socioeconomic gaps, cultural norms, and unequal access to work and educational opportunities all contribute to gender inequality in Assam, particularly the Barak Valley region. Women's roles are sometimes limited to the house by traditional cultural norms, which lead to disparities. Women still struggle with decision-making, healthcare access, and labor engagement (International Institute for Population Sciences [IIPS] & ICF, 2021; Pandey, Kumar, & Rai, 2025). Women must be strengthened through economic resources, political representation, education, and active participation in climate adaptation activities in order to address gender disparities.

2. Objectives

The study has four main goals.

(1) To study the socioeconomic causes of gender disparity in agriculture.

(2) To analyze role of culture in gender inequality.

(3) To assess challenges in achieving SDG 5.

(4) To study gender inequality in agriculture in relation of climate change, and adaptive resilience.

3. Methodology

The study employs a comparative research design that integrates primary data gathered through surveys and qualitative interviews with secondary data analysis. The approach is intended to offer a more thorough comprehension of gender differences in various cultural and socioeconomic circumstances.

3.1. Comparative Research Design

The study investigates gender disparities in India, Japan, and the Barak Valley region of Assam, India, by using the comparative research technique. These areas were chosen because they offer important viewpoints for comprehending the problem due to their unique cultural settings, and differing degrees of economic development.

3.2. Secondary Data Analysis

Secondary data were acquired from reliable sources from reputed journals, articles, research papers, reports from national and international, Government websites including India's National Statistical Office (NSO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Bank, and Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF). The findings provided a macro-level knowledge of the socioeconomic elements that influence gender disparity in agriculture, education, labour force participation, salary disparities, and political representation.

3.3. Primary Data Collection

Primary data collected from the Barak Valley region of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts of Assam, India. The study included 75 participants and uses Quantitative Surveys tool for data collection. Survey form was distributed to 75 women participants involved in agricultural activities from three districts of Barak Valley, Assam, India. The survey included information on wage discrepancies, work participation, decision-making power, and perceptions of gender inequality. Qualitative data collection of in-depth interviews with selected respondents were performed to better understand the cultural and societal norms that influence gender roles in agriculture.

4. Data Analysis

The analysis included both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and the qualitative interviews were interpreted using theme analysis. The findings from three districts of Barak Valley, Assam, India is compared to secondary data from India and Japan to uncover patterns and differences in gender disparity.

5. Results

The results are divided into four sections (i) Socioeconomic factors impacting gender inequality, (ii) Cultural aspects of gender inequality, (iii) Policy implementation and (iv) Climate change adaptation technology. The findings are also reviewed in relation to SDG 5 progress.

5.1. Socio-economic Factors Impacting Gender Inequality

5.1.1. Status of Women in Education

In India, Gender gaps in education remain a major issue. According to the NSO (2021), women had a literacy rate of 70.3%, compared to 84.7% for men. 14.4% gender gap in education reduces women's access to economic opportunities and labour market participation, limiting their overall growth and development. In Japan, women have lower educational attainment than males, with 45.4% of women aged 25-34 having University education vs 50.8% of men (OECD, 2025). In Barak Valley regions of Assam, India women have limited educational options, particularly in rural regions.

5.1.2. Women's Participation in Labour Workforce

Women's labour force participation in India is relatively low, at 32.4% compared to 77.6% for men in 2025 (World Bank Group, 2025). This discrepancy is primarily due to cultural norms, poor infrastructure assistance, and a scarcity of chances in formal industries. Directly or indirectly women are engaged in agricultural activities, where as their contributions are underestimated and underpaid. The rate of female labor force participation is higher in Japan (73%) (Kitao, 2026). However, conventional gender norms and the prevalence of irregular work continue to make it difficult for women to grow their careers. In the Barak Valley, women work in agriculture to a considerable extent, however they are primarily employed in informal, low-paying jobs. Women only make ₹200–250 per day, whereas males make ₹400–500. This pay gap is a reflection of broader cultural norms that devalue the labor of women.

5.1.3. Wage Gap

According to the NSSO, there was a 28% gender pay disparity in India in 2018–19, with women earning much less than men for equivalent work. Occupational segregation, diminished negotiating strength, and disruptions in women's employment due to family commitments are factors that affect the income disparity. In Japan, women make about 22% less than men (OECD, 2025). The large percentage of women working part-time in Japan exacerbates the wage gap by limiting their opportunities for progression and higher compensation. In the Barak Valley region of Assam, India, women are paid between Rs. 200 and Rs. 250 for the same amount of work in agricultural sectors, while males are paid between Rs. 400 and Rs. 500.

The fact that women's labor is often not acknowledged or compensated equally in the community. Whereas, 70% believed that the salary gap was unfair, 20% believed fair,

and 10% were unsure. This implies that although most people acknowledge the wrong, a sizable percentage do not consider it to be discrimination.

5.1.4. Political Representation

With 14% of seats in the Indian Parliament are held by women as of 2023, women's political representation in India is still quite low (Inter-Parliamentary Union). Women's political participation and leadership opportunities are still restricted by cultural and institutional factors, which lessen their ability to have an impact on agricultural policy decisions.

Approximately 11% of seats in Japan's lower house of parliament are held by women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023), but by 2026, that number rises to 21.72%. But there is gap exist in the political participation.

In Barak Valley region of Assam, India traditional gender norms and societal expectations hinder women's participation in leadership and community decision-making processes. Around 70% of women reported facing limited opportunities for leadership roles in agricultural cooperatives and community organizations. The remaining 30% felt that equal opportunities existed, but family responsibilities often prevented their active participation, resulting in important decisions being made by male family members, further marginalizing their participation in policy deliberations.

5.1.5. Health and Wellbeing

India has significant gender-based health inequities, with women experiencing higher rates of malnutrition and maternal death. India's maternal death rate is 88 per 100,000 live births (SRS, 2021-23). Poor women's health outcomes can limit their ability to fully participate in agricultural operations and achieve economic independence.

Japan has a very low maternal death rate of 3 per 100,000 live births (World Bank Group, 2026). However, Japanese women have issues in terms of work-life balance and mental health, owing to the stress of juggling career and family duties.

Intense physical labor in agriculture and restricted access to healthcare facilities have an influence on women's health in the Barak Valley.

The physical labor demands on agriculture and the lack of access to healthcare services have an influence on women's health in the Barak Valley. Women's productivity and well-being are limited by the burden of household obligations and agricultural labor, which exacerbates health issues. Approximately 66% of women stated that they don't frequently go to medical institutions.

5.2. Cultural Aspects of Gender Inequality

5.2.1. Traditional Gender Roles and Norms

Women's social responsibilities and agricultural activities are significantly impacted by India's traditional gender norms. Deeply rooted patriarchal customs are noticed in the Pew Research Center's 2022 report that states 61% of Indian women thought that they should listen and follow to their husbands in all aspects of family life.

The "good wife, wise mother" philosophy still dictates women's roles in Japan (Koyama, 2013). A 2023 study report from the Japanese Cabinet Office states that women who have children under the age of six must share 77.4% of domestic duties while earning dual incomes (earning by both couples). This demonstrates how Japanese women's career options are restricted by cultural expectations that they need to take care of household chores.

Traditional gender norms that specify women's responsibilities in the home and on the farm have an impact on the Barak Valley region of Assam, India. The gender division of labor and salary disparities are perpetuated because women are often thought to be less capable of carrying out more physically demanding duties. Approximately 60 - 70% of respondents concurred that conventional views of women's responsibilities restrict their access to agricultural initiatives, awareness campaigns, and skill development training, hence exacerbating gender gaps in agriculture.

5.2.2. Family Structure and Responsibilities

In India, traditional gender norms expected women to handle the majority of household chores. According to the OECD Economic Surveys, Japan 2024, women spend approx. 5 hours per day to household duties, compared to 1.6 hours for men. This large time difference limits women's capacity to pursue economic pursuits outside the house, including participation in agricultural development.

In Japan, women carry the burden of household obligations, working an average of 3 hours more than men per day on unpaid domestic work (OECD, 2023). This imbalance in family chores restricts women's capacity to work full-time or grow in their careers, including participation in agriculture domain and other profession.

In the Barak Valley, women's dual obligations in the household and agricultural workplace plays a major time strain on them, limiting their ability to pursue other economic options. Around 70-80% of respondents felt that societal expectations for women to prioritize family responsibilities limit their participation in community decision-making and leadership roles, contributing to gender inequality in the region.

5.2.3. Social Attitudes and Gender Norms

Traditional gender norms continue to influence Indian society, with 43% of people believing that men should take primary responsibility for earning income for the family (Pew Research Center, 2022). In Japan, cultural expectations surrounding family and work roles continue to influence women's job choices and prospects. According to a survey by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2021),

traditional gender roles and family-care responsibilities continue to affect women's career growth in Japan. These sociocultural expectations also contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions across agriculture and other development sectors.

In the Barak Valley, sociocultural attitudes and gender norms play a significant role in women's life. Women agricultural farmers and laborer are expected to complete all household work and do agricultural activities in the agricultural field, whereas decisions making powers are hold by men. These social conventions hinder women's access to skill development trainings and leadership program in agricultural development.

5.3. Policy Implementation

India has implemented various programs to promote gender equality, such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme and the Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act of 2017. However, the success of Beti Padhao Scheme is frequently hampered by uneven enforcement, inadequate fund, inefficient allocation of fund, unbalanced expenditure (Times of India, 2019). The Maternity Benefit Act is not implemented consistently across sectors, 90% of women engaged in informal employment face difficult to access (ILO, 2021). These issues impede the efficacy of policy efforts aimed at eliminating gender inequality in informal sector of development such as in agriculture farming, domestic work.

Japan has introduced several policies to promote gender equality, including the Basic Act for a Gender-Equal Society and workplace equality initiatives. Although these measures have improved women's participation, but traditional gender expectations and workplace challenges continue to affect their career growth and limit the full impact of these policies (JILPT, 2022; Cabinet Office of Japan, 2022).

In the Barak Valley region of Assam, traditional cultural practices and limited awareness of gender equality measures often reduce the effectiveness of policies. Field survey findings suggest that women's access to employment and welfare benefits is frequently influenced by male family members, limiting their empowerment and reinforcing gender inequalities in rural development and agriculture.

5.4. Climate Change Adaptation Technology

Due to problems like insufficient land ownership, a lack of credit, and a lack of knowledge about climate smart practices, women in India's agricultural sector often have restricted access to climate change adaptation technology (Barooah et al., 2023). This increases women's susceptibility to climate change by limiting their ability to implement effective climate adaption strategies.

Although in a different context, women farmers in Japan face comparable obstacles when trying to acquire climate change adaptation technologies. Accessing leadership and decision-making positions within agricultural organizations remains a barrier for women farmers in Japan. Women's potential is limited since they are underrepresented in agricultural cooperative decision-making positions (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 2021). Women's access is further hampered by traditional gender norms that place a higher priority on household responsibilities than professional involvement.

Financial constraints and conventional gender norms make it difficult for women in the Barak Valley region to obtain climate adaption solutions. According to field survey results, women frequently have fewer opportunities to acquire resources and take part in training programs, which limits their capacity to adapt to shifting environmental situations. Additionally, women's local expertise and adaptation strategies are frequently disregarded, which makes them more vulnerable and restricts their participation in climate-resilient agriculture.

6. Discussion

6.1. Gender Gaps in Education and Economic Development: The results demonstrate that women's social and economic progress is still impacted by educational disparities. Women's access to work and economic engagement is hampered in India and the Barak Valley region of Assam due to a lack of educational possibilities. Despite the fact that women in Japan have relatively greater educational chances, disparities in labor market outcomes indicate that education by itself does not ensure equal possibilities. These results suggest that attaining SDG 5 requires expanding access to education and guaranteeing equal opportunities for economic engagement.

6.2. Labour Force Participation and Gender Norms: Significant gender disparities in labor force participation throughout the research regions are highlighted in the study. Although women actively participate in agricultural operations in the Barak Valley region of Assam, India, their labor is frequently underappreciated and mostly concentrated in low-paying, informal industries. Despite Japan's comparatively greater female labor force participation rate, women's professional advancement and chances are nevertheless impacted by non-regular work and traditional gender norms.

6.3. Wage Gap: A Continuous Barrier to Economic Equality: In all study regions, gender-based wage disparities continue to be a major concern. Despite doing comparable agricultural labor, women in Barak Valley are paid less than males. According to survey results, the majority of respondents thought these income disparities were unfair. These disparities underline the necessity of stepping up efforts to guarantee equitable compensation and just acknowledgment of women's achievements.

6.4. Political Representation and Decision-Making Power: Women continue to be underrepresented in positions of leadership and decision-making throughout the study regions. Research from Barak Valley indicates that women's participation in leadership roles and community decision-making is frequently diminished by social expectations and family obligations. In Japan, women are still less represented in positions of institutional and political leadership, which presents similar difficulties.

6.5. Health and Wellbeing: Addressing Gender Disparities: Health-related issues still have an impact on women's general well-being and productivity. Barak Valley women reported using healthcare services infrequently because of workload and accessibility concerns. Similarly, women in Japan continue to struggle to strike a balance between work and family obligations, and overall women in India continue to face national health disparities.

6.6. Cultural and Social Norms: Overcoming Structural Barriers: Women's roles in society and agriculture are still shaped by traditional gender standards. In every research location, cultural norms frequently assign women more domestic duties, which restricts their involvement in leadership, work, education, and skill-building initiatives.

6.7. Challenges of Policy Implementation: Bridging the Gap Between Law and Practice: Despite the fact that Japan and India have launched a number of programs and policies to advance gender equality, the results indicate that their effects are still inconsistent. The efficacy of these measures is nonetheless diminished by low awareness, implementation gaps, and societal hurdles, especially in rural areas like the Barak Valley region of Assam, India.

6.8. Access to Climate Change Adaptation Technologies: According to the study, there is still unequal access to resources and technologies for climate adaptation. While women in Japan still struggle with institutional participation and decision-making, women in the Barak Valley reported having restricted access to agricultural resources and training opportunities. These obstacles make it harder for women to fully participate in sustainable development and climate-resilient farming methods.

7. Conclusion

In the context of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5), which focuses on attaining gender equality and empowering women and girls, this study investigated gender discrepancies by comparing India, Japan, and the Barak Valley region of Assam, India. The results demonstrate that gender inequality is still a significant issue in every location, despite variations in social structures, cultural backgrounds, and economic progress.

According to the study, women's chances and general standing in society are still influenced by a number of socioeconomic issues, such as education, labor force participation, salary disparities, political representation, and health conditions.

Women's economic advancement is still hampered in India and the Barak Valley region of Assam by salary disparities, a lack of formal employment possibilities, and limited educational opportunities. On the other hand, despite notable advancements in women's education and labor force participation in Japan, traditional gender norms and workplace restrictions continue to hinder women's professional advancement and leadership prospects. These results imply that social and structural hurdles continue to influence women's experiences, making economic advancement insufficient to attain gender equality.

The results also show that cultural norms and traditional gender expectations have a significant impact on all research regions. In addition to agricultural and economic pursuits, women frequently have more household obligations, which limits their prospects for leadership, education, skill development, and decision-making roles. Women's access to training opportunities, resources, and institutional engagement is further restricted in the Barak Valley region of Assam, India, due to traditional views about their responsibilities. These societal perspectives still perpetuate gender disparities and obstruct women's advancement.

The survey also shows that despite the introduction of a number of initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality, there are still issues with their execution. The efficacy of these initiatives is frequently diminished by low knowledge, gaps in execution, and pre-existing social barriers, especially in rural areas. Therefore, in order to create significant and long-lasting change, it is imperative to ensure improved implementation and equal access to opportunities.

An additional significant discovery concerns agricultural response to climate change. Women still have unequal access to agricultural resources, information, training programs, and climate adaptation decision-making procedures. These obstacles make them more vulnerable and prevent them from actively engaging in climate-resilient farming methods. Increased acknowledgment of women's talents, expertise, and experiences can support more sustainable and inclusive methods of agricultural development.

Overall, the analysis comes to the conclusion that more than just policy actions are needed to achieve SDG 5. Stronger policy execution, better economic and educational possibilities, increased female participation in leadership and decision-making processes, and gradual shifts in conventional social views are all necessary for sustainable progress toward gender equality. In addition to lowering gender inequities, empowering women in agriculture and other development sectors is crucial for attaining inclusive growth and sustainable development.

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A Study on the Challenges Faced By the Visually Impaired Students in Schools in Shillong

Dr. Rituparna Rajendra [1]
Ibasuk Khyriem [2]

Abstract

This study aims to determine the different academic, emotional, and social issues faced by visually impaired (VI) students in an inclusive environment. The research was carried out in Jyoti Sroat School, the sole school in Shillong that provides inclusive education and specialty assistance provided to children with visual impairment. Increasing attention has been given on inclusive education in India over recent years; however there remains a large void to understand the everyday experience of students with visual impairments, especially in the northeastern part of India. It is an attempt to cover that gap by gathering and analysing first-hand information from students themselves.

It was carried out through a mixed-method approach, largely founded on quantitative data gathered through systematic questionnaires. These questionnaires were administered to partially sighted or totally blind students from Class 6 to Class 12. The questions spanned a broad spectrum of subject covering their experiences, with particular emphasis on the classroom to their learning styles, access to study material, interaction with peers and teachers, emotional responses, and overall integration into school life. Besides primary data, the research also involved secondary information were obtained from books, academic journals, organization websites, WHO publications, and research carried out in other nations.

This research identifies that blind students at Jyoti Sroat School are getting significant assistance provided in the form of learning aids and teacher involvement, yet they continue to fall behind in emotional support, access to materials, and social participation. The study suggests increased teacher training on inclusive instruction, improved access to accessible materials, enhanced emotional counselling facilities, and organized programs to facilitate peer interaction and social engagement. By implementing these measures, school can develop a more respectful, inclusive and empowering inclusive environment where every student, regardless of disability, is given equal opportunities to learn, grow and thrive..

Keywords: *Visual Impairment, Inclusive Education, Academic Challenges, Social Inclusion, Emotional Well-Being, Assistive Technology*

Introduction

Visual impairment refers to loss of vision, might be caused by a result of accidents or birth. Eyes are important as they assist us in identifying objects and creatures which notify the brain where they are recognized. According to American Foundation for the

[1] Dr. Rituparna Rajendra, HOD, PG Department of Social Work, St. Edmund's College, Shillong. Mobile No. 9863023403. Email: rituparnarajendra@gmail.com

[2] Ibasuk Khyriem, MSW, PG Department of Social Work, St. Edmund's College, Shillong. Mobile No. 9863420952. Email: ibakhyriem05@gmail.com

Blind (AFB), (2023), visual impairment refers to a loss of vision that cannot be corrected by standard eyeglasses or corrective contact lenses and interferes with daily living. International Association of Audio-Visual Translators (IAAVT), (2023) Visual impairment refers to any degree of vision loss, from mild to severe, that affects an individual's ability to access visual information. Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF), (2023) Visual impairment includes blindness, low vision, and other visual limitations that affect an individual's ability to participate fully in society. As per the World Health Organization (2019), blindness is a condition in which someone's visual acuity is worse than 3/60 or his/her visual field is limited to less than 10 degrees in the better eye even with the best correction, meaning that he/she cannot see at 3 meters what a normal-sighted person can see at 60 meters. Low vision as defined by the National Eye Institute (n.d.) is having a best-corrected visual acuity between 20/70 and 20/400 in the better eye, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less.

The claim is precisely pointing to the manner of blind individuals relying on non-visual senses primarily touch and sound to perceive and navigate their environment. The study on sensory compensation and neuroplasticity was strongly backed. Sacks and Wolffe (2006) report that blind individuals base their skills on other auditory and tactile abilities, which allow them to separate people and objects based on voice recognition, spatial hearing, or touch exploration.

The passage also accurately defines visual impairment as per the definition provided by National Eye Institute (n.d.), in which they define visual impairment as any significant vision loss that cannot be corrected. It is essential to ensure distinctions between low vision and blindness both in health and education sectors. Low vision represents a measurable visual impairment allowing for some functional vision, while blindness implies an absolute or near absolute loss of vision that cannot be corrected by routine treatment.

Besides, the belief that VI individuals can lead normal lives after training or assistance is echoed by the World Health Organization (2019), which highlights that VI individuals can achieve complete integration into society through relevant rehabilitation services, assistive technology, and inclusive measures. This is in defence of the possibility that visual impairment may not be an impediment to autonomy or quality of life if adequate interventions exist.

Students with visual impairments encounter numerous challenges in school that can greatly influence their learning. The main issue is their inability to read written text, like books or the blackboard, which are often used for class exercises. This visual disability limits their access to important information. Consequently, these students may find it difficult to keep up with lessons, complete assignments, or fully participate in class discussions. Their academic progress can suffer if no support systems are available.

In some inclusive and well-equipped schools, tools like Braille help to address these challenges. Braille is a tactile writing system that employs raised dots to symbolize

letters and characters numbers, allowing VI students to read and write independently. Braille books, worksheets, and writing tools such as the slate and stylus or Braille typewriter enable these students to access educational materials in a format they can use.

Having Braille makes learning to read easier and improves self-confidence and academic involvement. Besides Braille, some schools also provide supportive technologies such as screen readers and audiobooks, offering additional support for learning. With these support systems in place, visually impaired students can overcome obstacles, achieve academic success, and take part in the learning process alongside their sighted peers.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the academic challenges and accessibility barriers faced by visually impaired students in schools.
2. To assess the social skills of visually impaired students within the school environment.
3. To evaluate the emotional experiences of visually impaired students in the school setting.

Review of Literature

Various studies have discussed the situation of visually impaired students in inclusive education settings. Although inclusive education is widely encouraged, many researchers highlight that several practical challenges still remain challenges faced by students with visual impairments. Common issues mentioned include lack of accessible learning materials, insufficient teacher training, and infrastructural limitations within schools. These factors directly affect students' academic participation and overall school experience.

According to Salami, inclusive education policies may appear strong in theory, but their implementation often remains weak due to limited resources and inadequate infrastructure. The study indicates that in the absence of adequate support systems, inclusive education cannot function effectively at the ground level.

Similarly, Wiafe-Kwagyan and Ampontuah, highlighted the shortage of Braille materials and the limited preparation of teachers in inclusive teaching methods. The findings suggest that inadequate teacher training and the unavailability of accessible learning resources can significantly hinder the academic performance of students with visual impairments..

In the Indian context, Singh (2024) discussed systemic barriers in promoting inclusive education in accordance with the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 as an important legal framework supporting equal educational rights. However, despite the existence of such policies, practical challenges still remain in many schools.

Overall, the examined literature indicates that although inclusive education is supported at the policy level, its implementation is not always effective. Moreover, there is limited research focusing specifically on Shillong. Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this gap by examining the lived experiences of visually impaired students in the local context.

Methodology

Research design

A mixed-method descriptive research design was utilized for the study.

Sampling

Purposive sampling technique was applied to select visually impaired students from classes 6 to 12.

Area of study

The study was carried out in Jyoti Sroat School in Shillong, capital of Meghalaya in North-East India.

Data collection

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires containing closed-ended questions. Secondary data were collected from journals, books, and reports by organizations such as the World Health Organization.

Data analysis

The data were examined using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency and percentage analysis.

Findings

Background Information of Participants

The findings revealed that the majority of participants reported that (53.57%) are aged 11 to 14 years, while 46.43% are aged 15 to 19 years. This indicates that both middle school and high school students were represented, with the former being predominantly in middle school and the latter potentially in high school. The sample consisted of more female students (57.14%) than male students (42.86%), indicating more girls were actively involved as participants in the study. The majority of the

students (64.29%) are from classes 6 to 8, whereas fewer are enrolled from classes 9 to 12. Among the type of disability, 53.57% are low vision, 35.71% are completely blind, and 10.71% belong to other types. The majority of them (60.71%) reside in hostels, implying that most of them reside away from their families to access better educational opportunities.

This background is reminiscent of studies conducted by Abdulrahim Halilu Jikamshi (2024), where it was established that blind students who lived in school environments where accommodations were provided were more accessible to learning despite challenges related to infrastructure and psychological support. These numbers illustrate that most of the students are in their early school-going age and need age-based academic and emotional interventions in order to enable their growth in an integrated setting.

Academic Understanding and Classroom Experience

Most students (71.43%) said they could understand lessons taught at a normal speed, while some (25%) said they understood only sometimes. A very small number (3.571%) said they could not follow. However, when asked if they would understand better if the teacher slowed down or repeated things, almost 90% agreed. This shows that teaching styles and pace have a big impact on their understanding. Approximately 53.57% of the students indicated that

they occasionally find it hard to comprehend classes, and 17.86% reported that they frequently do so. It indicates that teaching styles might still have to be further modified to better assist them. The students are supplied with materials of various accessible formats: 42.86% are supplied with braille, 10.71% are supplied with audio, 25% are supplied with printed material, and 21.43% are supplied with printed materials, and 21.43% are provided with a mix of braille and audio. In terms of learning tools, 39.29% employ braille slates, 28.57% employ screen readers, and another 28.57% employ both. This indicates a good utilization of assistive technology. 46.43% utilize braille, 32.14% utilize print or sound, and 7.14% utilize both during exams. An overwhelming majority (82.14%) indicated they receive additional assistance or remedial classes from instructors. They also informed that they have enough time for exams and homework, with 82.14% agreeing. Most students, 67.86%, also mentioned that teachers involve them in discussions about their learning needs. However, 17.86% said this happens sometimes, while 14.29% felt they are not involved at all. Despite this, 89.29% of students reported feeling that the school environment is supportive.

These findings align with Salami, who focused on teacher training and assistive technology, and with Kapur, which explained how slow and adapted instruction improves the performance of visually impaired students. Similar accessibility measureswere facilitated in Annie's investigation into the accessibility of practical subjects. In spite of scholarly help, additional modification in teaching methods and increased ease in study material will enhance comprehension and equal participation for visually impaired students.

Mobility and Independence

Most of the students (92.86%) stated that they are able to move around the school by themselves. Few others can move only between specific areas such as classrooms, libraries, and toilets. This reflects that students have been trained or facilitated well in mobility.

This resonates with infrastructural findings by Wiafe-Kwagyan and Ampontuahthat emphasized orientation and mobility training within inclusive schools to facilitate visually impaired students to travel around independently and confidently. The student mobility is strong, reflecting successful guidance and support measures, but constant improvements in facilities are essential for complete independence of all students.

Social Inclusion and Relationships

When asked about group games or activities, 50% of the students said they do not feel left out, while 42.86% said they do feel left out. This indicates that while most feel included, some experience social isolation. On a positive note, 71.43% reported that their peers do not exclude them because of their disability. A significant percentage (85.71%) expressed a need for help with being friendly, suggesting they like people but may require support. Most children (85.71%) also showed that they enjoy talking with teachers, and 75% like conversing with peers. Participation in activities is also relatively high; 53.57% said they always take part. Most students (71.43%) reported that they ask for help when needed. However, only 32.14% said they always communicate clearly when sharing their thoughts and 28.57% said they never do. This shows some challenges with oral communication. Still, 71.43% of respondents said they always listen attentively when others speak, and 53.57% said they try to understand things from other people's viewpoints, indicating strong listening and empathy skills. The majority (78.57%) follow classroom rules, and 71.43% wait in line for their turn to talk. A large number (89.29%) respect others' personal space and feelings. More than half (53.57%) said they feel included all the time during group discussions or play, but some feel left out sometimes or often.

These findings are supported by Bacalla et al., who noted that visually impaired students experience some peer interaction but still feel excluded. Saks pointed out that inclusive method must go beyond just physical accessibility to include peer awareness and support systems. Even though students show good social behavior and friendships, creating structured peer support and communication skill programs will further improve inclusion and social comfort.

Emotional Well-being and Support

46.43% of the students reported difficulty in expressing their emotions effectively or emotions well. Additionally, 46.43% said they feel discouraged from participating in school activities because of their disability. On a positive note, 85.71% mentioned that they receive emotional support from the school. When asked about feeling included with classmates, 75% said that they always do. Furthermore, 85.71%

reported feeling supported by teachers. Most (57.14%) stated they never feel ignored or left out by others, though some still do. About 71.43% said they always feel confident during class, which shows high self-esteem. However, 32.14% reported always feeling stressed about schoolwork, and 42.86% occasionally worry about being treated differently. This suggests that some students still face anxiety and stress. More than half (53.57%) expressed frustration when they cannot easily access learning materials, and the same percentage said they always feel anxious about keeping up with classmates. Yet, 57.14% indicated their opinions are respected, and 67.86% reported feeling happy at school, reflecting a mostly supportive and positive environment.

This aligns with the research findings of Tahiri (2023), which highlight that stress and emotional exclusion are common among visually impaired students, especially when academic adaptations or emotional support are lacking. Jeyarani and Srimathi also emphasized that emotional burdens from academic pressure and stigma require counselling and mentoring interventions in schools. Overall emotional health, as well as stress and anxiety, indicate that schools should focus on peer mentoring, school counselling, and programs for emotional literacy.

In summary the findings indicate that although most visually impaired students possess a good degree of independence, self-confidence, and academic guidance, they still encounter social inclusion, communication, and emotional difficulties. Assistive devices, remedial classes, and friendly environments have been provided by the schools with some effort, but better focus on classroom teaching styles, friendship generation, and expression of their feelings need to be achieved. With ongoing assistance and incremental refinement, their school life can be all the more inclusive, empowering, and enjoyable.

Discussion

Most visually impaired students received their Educational assistance provided through Braille-based learning resources, materials, assistive technology, and remedial classes, although gaps remain. However, students still struggled to learn, especially when teachers spoke too quickly or explained things poorly. Most students said they would learn better if teachers slowed down or summarized instructions. This underscores the importance of changes in teaching style for better inclusive learning.

The lack of enough braille materials and assistive devices sometimes made it hard for students to fully access educational content. Social inclusion was another major issue. While many students enjoyed talking with their peers and teachers, some still felt left out during class discussions or group games. A significant number of students said they needed help making friends. This shows that although visually impaired students want to be part of school life, they may require extra support to connect with classmates and feel included in activities.

Emotionally, most students said they felt motivated and supported by their teachers. However, many reported feeling stressed or anxious, especially when they struggled to interact with peers or access learning resources. Nearly half of the students indicated that they found it hard to express their feelings. Some even felt discouraged from joining activities because of their disability. This points out to the need for additional emotional support mechanisms in schools, such as counselling or mentoring. Secondary data from global health and educational agencies indicate similar patterns (World Health Organization; National Eye Institute). These studies indicated that visually impaired students in most countries experience challenges such as a lack of trained teachers, limited learning materials, poor infrastructure, and psychological problems like low self-esteem. These findings confirm that the issues identified in Shillong are not unique, but rather a component of a broader global trend that warrants serious attention.

Conclusion

The study found that most visually impaired students received little learning support, such as braille, audio materials, and screen readers. Many got help through remedial classes and extra time for assignments or tests. Teachers and school staff were generally supportive, and many students reported they could navigate the school independently, indicating effective training in mobility skills. However, students still struggled to learn, especially when teachers spoke too quickly or explained things poorly. Most students said they would learn better if teachers slowed down or summarized instructions. This highlights the need for changes in teaching style for better inclusive learning.

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Climate Variability, Distress Migration and Gendered Livelihood Vulnerability: A Case of Women Tea Plantation Workers

Dr. Rajdeep Dutta [1]

Abstract

This article provides an in-depth case study of women who work as temporary tea garden labourers in the Sonitpur district of Assam. In the past two years (2023 and 2024), their livelihoods have been significantly affected by a prolonged drought that occurs every year between December and April. The study aims to investigate the experiences of three tea garden workers, notably in the context of climate uncertainty, gendered labour insecurity, and vulnerability to socio-economic distress during migration. Employing a qualitative methodology, the research utilises semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to explore systemic gaps in social protection and climate adaptation policies that disproportionately affect marginalised women in rain-fed tea plantation economies. The findings highlight the urgent need for implementing gender-sensitive interventions, including protected migration legislation, improved social security systems, and climate-resilient livelihoods. The research interests include contemporary discourses on climate justice, gendered labour markets, and the sustainability of rural life within the Indian tea plantation economy.

Keywords: *Climate Vulnerability, Gendered Labour, Tea Plantations, Distress Migration, Social Protection, Assam*

Introduction

The Assam tea industry is a socio-cultural institution that employs six million people directly and indirectly in plantations. Climate change has affected tea production in Sonitpur. Unpredictable rainfall, long dry spells, and occasional droughts quickly put an end to plucking rotations and reduce yields, threatening plantation earnings, household food and financial security (Ethical Consumer, 2020; Tea Board of India, 2022; World Tea News, 2025). Tea Board of India (2024) and UNICEF (2023) report that between February and April 2024, rainfall in the Sonitpur district was 60% below normal, leading to severe wage losses among seasonal leaf pluckers, 90% of whom are women. Such shocks highlight the extent to which vulnerability of climate-driven livelihoods exacerbates gender inequality in the plantation economy (Das, 2021; Oxfam India, 2024). Women are the backbone of tea estates, but their work is mostly temporary, neglected, and excluded from most worker protections and benefits (Sharma, 2019; International Employment Organisation, 2008). The gendered gap in climate-related wage loss increases household debt, malnutrition, caregiving burdens,

[1] Dr. Rajdeep Dutta, Lecturer Non-Medical (MSW), Department of Community Medicine, Tezpur Medical College & Hospital, Assam, Mobile No: +91-6001361460, Email:duttaraj9864@gmail.com

and the risk of alcoholism-related family conflict and forces families into distressing displacement. The experiences of tea estate workers in Assam reflect social and political transformations in which climate shocks compound structural vulnerability. The prolonged drought between February and April 2023 and 2024 hit many casual tea leaf pluckers and their families very severely, resulting in interruptions in work and a collapse in wages. They demonstrate how the loss of livelihoods due to climate change leads to alcoholism, debt, cyclical poverty, gendered labour stress, institutional neglect, and forced displacement (Baruah, 2020; Oxfam, 2019; Rabby, 2012). Placing micro-level household difficulties within larger debates about climate change, poverty, urban exploitation, and vulnerability for children reveals a vital lens for understanding the intersecting layers of vulnerability in Assam's tea industry (Das, 2021; UNICEF, 2023; The Times, 2024).

Thematic Review of Related Literature

Climate vulnerability and livelihood insecurity: The tea sector in Assam is extremely weather-dependent and makes the lives of plantation workers risky. Tea needs a fine balance of rainfall, temperature, and humidity to grow. Extended droughts, sporadic rainfall, and untimely floods affected productivity. According to the Tea Board of India (2022), extreme weather events have caused a decline in tea harvests by as much as 40% in some estates, affecting daily wage leaf pluckers. Climate shocks have a direct impact on wages, as temporary workers are paid per kilogram or per day plucking (Baruah, 2020). Ethical Consumer (2020) says "climate-dependent livelihoods" leave workers vulnerable to income shocks, food poverty, and debt. According to World Tea News (2025), the economic risks triggered by climate affect most of the agricultural workers in Global South contexts with weak institutional protections. The monoculture of tea in Assam restricts income diversification and increases climatic risks (Das, 2023). The climate–livelihood nexus places Assam's tea workers on the front line of environmental and socio-economic fragility.

Labour precarity and structural exclusion: Assam's tea industry has historically divided workers into permanent and casual labourers. Under the 1951 Plantations Labour Act (PLA), permanent labourers could be provided with food, housing, healthcare, and minimal social benefits. Such entitlements are not available to temporary and casual labourers, who constitute the majority during plucking seasons (Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020). Dutta and Sarma (2021) show that casualization fragments labour solidarities and raise informal credit use and reduce bargaining leverage. Structural violence happens when workers' policy rights are rarely enforced, says the Comptroller and Auditor General (2024). The plantation owners use loopholes in the labour law to minimize their obligations, to the detriment of women and temporary workers. Comparative evidence from other plantation regions in India (Tamil Nadu, Kerala) suggests that while unionization has historically improved labor standards, temporary workers remain on the periphery of collective bargaining (Oxfam India, 2021). Thus, Assam's plantation system reinforces a dual

economy where entitlements are stratified by contract status, perpetuating inequality within already marginalized communities.

Gendered dimensions of vulnerability: Women make up nearly half of Assam's tea workforce, but they tend to do low-paid, labor-intensive plucking (Sharma, 2019). Rajbangshi and Nambiar (2020) mentioned that plantations offer limited childcare support, suffer from gender-based wage disparity, and provide minimal maternity benefits. Women in crisis are compelled to feed families, cope with sickness, and care for elderly relatives, all while precariously employed (Das, 2021). Oxfam India (2024) notes that women working in informal sectors like tea plantations are "double marginalized" they are economically devalued and socially restricted by patriarchal norms. UNICEF (2023) shows how these inequalities fuel poverty, as daughters from tea households are often dropped from school to assist with care or domestic work. The study by the International Labour Organization (2008) shows that women plantation workers in South Asia report higher rates of harassment at work, limited autonomy, and violence. This shows how gender, class, and caste affect plantation vulnerabilities.

Poor health and social factors: The tea communities in India are among the poorest. Structural issues in sanitation, housing, and health care disproportionately affect women, as Rajbangshi and Nambiar (2020) point out. "More than 68% of children of tea workers in Assam are anemic," says UNICEF (2023). Long-run educational outcomes and cognitive development suffer. Alcoholism is a common coping mechanism and a destructive force. According to Sharma (2019), unemployment or loss of wages leads to an increase in substance addiction, which diverts household resources from food and healthcare and causes interpersonal conflict. Alcoholism engenders child terror, discord between spouses, and multi-generational trauma, further destabilizing fragile families. The state health system is failing and making these problems worse. CAG (2024) reveals that faculty plantation healthcare mandates render plantation hospitals understaffed, underequipped, and inaccessible to temporary workers. Failing to address the social determinants of health creates a vicious cycle of disease, debt, and economic instability.

Migration, debt, and exploitation: Migration turns into a matter of survival, a new field of exploitation. As Dutta and Sarma (2021) write, tea workers travel seasonally to Bangalore, Chennai, and Delhi, often through labor agencies that charge them high fees and abuse them. Migration rarely alleviates poverty; it merely shifts vulnerabilities to metropolitan areas with precarious earnings, hazardous work and no legal protections (Das, 2021). Rabby (2012) revealed that unregulated migration has a negative impact on kinship networks and exploits migrants. Baruah (2020) and UNICEF (2023) argue that children of migrant workers are more likely to drop out of school or work informally.

Intergenerational poverty and structural neglect: Assam's tea-garden labourers live in structurally poor homes. Colonial recruitment tactics have marginalised tea garden workers socially, economically, and geographically. Das (2023) and Oxfam (2019)

argue that weak welfare regimes perpetuate intergenerational poverty through labour exploitation. Children of plantation workers experience malnutrition, poor education, social exclusion, and health risks (UNICEF, 2023). Rajbangshi and Nambiar (2020) term this phenomenon as "structural exclusion", which highlights the exclusion of plantation communities from development, despite their significant contributions to India's tea industry.

Thus, the scholastic ideas demonstrate how climate shocks, work precarity, gender inequality, health crises, debt, and migration result in long-term poverty and hardship. Climate uncertainty threatens rain-fed agrarian economies, especially monocrop tea plantations. Assam, which produces more than half of India's tea, particularly affects underprivileged women, illustrating the instability of such labour. An anomalous drought in the beginning of 2023 and 2024 disrupted the socio-economic stability of temporary women tea-garden workers of the Sonitpur District. This case study tries to show the impacts of climate shocks on family health, debt cycles, and gendered labour instability, which result in distressful migration for survival. The study is an effort to address the approaches guided by feminist political ecology and vulnerability theory, with a focus on how structural injustices heighten climate risks for women in informal labour market spaces.

Objectives

- To investigate the effects of climate variability on temporary female tea garden workers of Sonitpur District, Assam.
- To understand the effect of reduced productivity on livelihood of plantation workers.
- To know the coping strategies adopted by workers and specific conditions that influences their decision to migrate.
- To assess the impact of migration on workers' access to healthcare services and on children's education.

Methodology

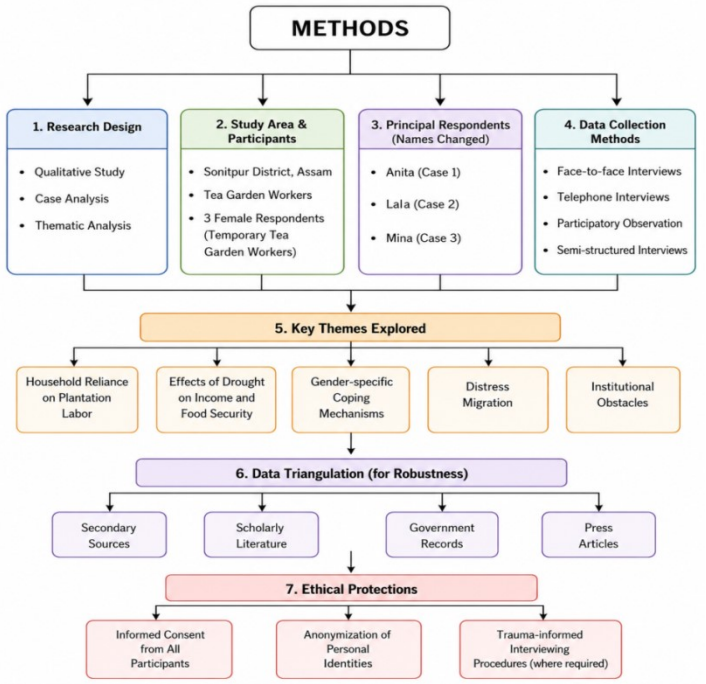
This study is a qualitative case analysis that integrates in-depth interviews (both face-to-face and telephone) with migrant family members, participatory observation, and thematic analysis. The principal respondents- Anita (Case 1), Lala (Case 2), and Mina (Case 3)—are temporary female tea garden workers (all three names have been altered). The tea pluckers in Sonitpur District, Assam, whose experiences were examined with those of their family members during the duration of three months (May–July 2025). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate critical topics such as reliance on plantation labour within households, the effects of drought on income and food security, gender-specific coping mechanisms, distress migration, and institutional obstacles. Data were triangulated with secondary sources, pertinent

scholarly literature, governmental records, and press articles to guarantee robustness. Ethical protections were rigorously implemented, including the acquisition of informed consent from all participants, the anonymization of personal identities to safeguard vulnerable respondents, and trauma-informed interviewing techniques were applied whenever required.

Results and Findings

Case Study-1

Family composition and social location: Anita (female, 33 years old) comes from a marginalised family in the Tea Belt of Assam. After Anita's husband died of an undiagnosed illness in 2022. She raised her three daughters, of whom Sumi (14 years old), already in Class IX, was the oldest; Rupa is the middle child (11 years old) and in 6th grade. The youngest, Meena (7 years old), is in early primary school. Without a male breadwinner and little kinship support, Anita survived on her temporary estate job, earning Rs. 250 per day in the plucking seasons. But widowhood carried many social stigmas. Tea estate widows are generally shunned and considered 'inauspicious.' Anita mentioned, *when my husband died, neighbors stopped inviting me to weddings. They claimed I brought terrible luck. But how can I be blamed for his illness? Even my neighbors, many say, 'She is a burden'.* Whereas the family lived in a one-room house made of mud with a leaking tin roof during monsoons. Life was challenging with poor water, energy, and sanitation.



Climate shock and employment loss: Sonitpur faced unseasonal drought in early 2023. There was not enough rain, and the tea bushes dried up ahead of time, stopping the plucking cycles. For temporary or *faltu* workers like Anita, the situation meant instant unemployment. Permanent workers earned meager wages, but casual laborers, 40 percent of the plantation workforce, were told to return "when leaves appeared again." Anita recalls the firing vividly: *"The manager said, 'No rain, no job."* Anita asked, *"How will my children eat until then?"* He shrugged and walked off. *They see us as numbers, not people.* Within two weeks of losing their work, the family's

modest food supplies were depleted. The daughters recalled days of hunger. Sumi (14): *"We boiled the rice with salt and water. Maa occasionally blended tea leaves into rice to fill our bellies. My sisters screamed from hunger at night. I stopped eating entire meals so that kids could eat more".* Rupa (11): *"I told Maa I will stop attending school since my stomach was constantly hurting from hunger. I couldn't carry books when I wasn't strong."* Food insecurity is not new among plantation homes, but the drought exacerbated it. The Public Distribution System (PDS) offered rice, but that was not sufficient for all family members, and those without income were unable to purchase vegetables, lentils, or oil. Malnutrition worsened, especially among children.

Debt and informal borrowing: Like many plantation families, Anita lived off local moneylenders. She borrowed ₹5,000 with no collateral or formal banking, charging 10% interest per month. Her debt quickly became overwhelming. *"I borrowed for work, for repayment, and hoping for rain. The rain didn't come. The monthly interest exceeded my financial capabilities. My lender yelled at everyone and embarrassed me at home. "*Anita's debt problem was embarrassing and put her daughters in danger. Sumi said, *"One lender said to Maa, 'Send me to work at his shop to repay the loan. Mather declined, but he says poor females work, not study".* This shows that indebtedness often leads to underage labour and exploitation of poor groups.

Gendered burdens of widowhood: Anita's widowhood made her more vulnerable. Women in plantation villages lose income and social protection when men are absent. Widows could be excluded from union and pay talks. *'Union men say, 'You are a widow and a temporary female worker.'* Amita emphasized the dual challenges. Being single made her easy prey for harassment. Several women in the queues warned her about estate supervisors who exploit widows by giving them temporary jobs. Anita resisted, but her detachment from plantation management networks grew.

Education interrupted and child marriage risks: Anita had limited resources and had to decide whether to send her girls to school or to work. The oldest, Sumi, dropped out of school to help her mother. *"I wanted to learn and to become a teacher,"* she said. How can I learn when my sisters are hungry? *"Her neighbors had urged the middle daughter to marry early. Some women asked me, "Why keep Rupa at home?"* said Anita. It would reduce the number of people to feed. But how can I marry her when she is only eleven years old? Threats of child marriage can be due to poverty, hunger, and widowhood. Anita's objection shows awareness but no system of action.

Health vulnerabilities: Health crises exacerbated economic distress. The family had recurrent fevers, diarrhea, and fatigue. Anita turned to home remedies when she couldn't afford treatment. Her husband's earlier death from tuberculosis was a disturbing memory: *"My spouse coughed blood for months. The estate hospital only administered paracetamol. It was too late when we carried him to the district hospital. He died in my arms. I'm afraid the same will happen to my children if they become ill."* The tea garden area did not have adequate healthcare, and combination of malnutrition and excessive labour increased cycles of sickness and mortality.

Decision to migrate: Anita moved out in May 2023 after months of no work. Her relatives spoke of jobs with the clothes manufacturers in Chennai. It was a painful choice, but one that had to be made: *"Staying meant starving my daughters. Destroying the family. Sumi, the eldest, can work, so I went off with her. I left the kids with a far-away aunt. I cry every night, 'Who is going to save them?'"* Sumi left school to migrate: *"I wanted a school uniform, not a job uniform. But Mother cannot do everything alone. I begged her, Take me with you."*

Life in Chennai: Anita and Sumi worked in textile factories with thousands of migrant women in Chennai. They were promised ₹9,000, but after deducting dormitory and food expenses, they got ₹6,000 per month. The workplace was brutal: 10-hour shifts, verbal abuse from managers, constant surveillance. Anita reflected: *"They claim we are free, yet here we are like bonded workers. If we complain, they reply, 'Go home.' But what about home? There is no work in our tea garden.*" Sumi, at 14, struggled to adjust: *"I stitched garments for people in cities while my sisters in the rural wore damaged clothes. I occasionally fainted from the heat inside the building. I wanted to go away, but I didn't have any money or a place to go."* The migration, which was intended to help people survive, became another form of exploitation.

Children left behind: Rupa and Meena, two younger daughters, were kept by an aunt in Assam. Separation was devastating. Rupa (11): *I dream of Amma and Sumi while sleeping. I cry and worry about their safety. Occasionally, I hear my aunt yell that I have a second mouth. "I miss Maa's hug.* Meena (7): *"I wonder, 'When will Amma come?' They say she lives in a big city. "I don't want rice; I want Maa."* Children abandoned by migrant workers are often subjected to ill-treatment, disruption of studies, and psychological hardship. Without parental care, they are vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, and dropping out of school.

Case Study-2

Family background and living conditions: Lala (26 years old) was a casual worker in a tea garden in Sonitpur, Assam. Drought months take away her and her husband's plucking jobs. Later, her 29-year-old husband moved to Bangalore and became a daily wage worker. She worked as a domestic help in a nearby town. They have a three-year-old boy and a two-year-old daughter. Both show indicators of malnutrition, which are also, recorded in children's MCP cards by health personnel. Mother-in-law (about 60+ years old) severely ill, dependent on bidi and local alcohol ('daru'), unable to contribute financially. The family's socioeconomic standing is extremely poor and lower class. When asked to describe the issue, the young guy replied, *"I waited every morning at the factory gate, hoping for a job. But the manager answered, 'No leaves, no work.' Without rain, how will plants grow? For three months, we had no income.*" The wife remarked on their financial difficulties: *"We had nothing. Children cry for milk, but I am unable to purchase it. I give them rice*

water or nothing at night. My husband began drinking more while he was idle. Finally, he stated that he will travel to Bangalore to get work."

Climate variability and the loss of tea work: This family was already experiencing a decline due to the drought in February and April. Tea bushes have to be watered regularly to maintain the "first flush" of tender leaves, which are so vital to the volume and quality of the output. The rainfall deficit this season has led to a 40% reduction in plucking days in some plantations of Sonitpur district (Tea Board, 2022). Without rain, the bushes dry up in the sun. Management sends us home. No work, no pay. "So what now?" The family lived on the wife's wages for domestic labor in a nearby town because of seasonal unemployment. She traveled a lot, leaving the kids with her mother in law. The wife said, *"I clean, wash clothes, and wash dishes in three houses. Sometimes they give me rice. My monthly income is between 2500-3500 rupees. Not enough. My son says, 'No eggs, no milk?' "What response can I give?".*

Alcoholism and household strain: Men were unemployed and drunk, a common tendency among plantation workers during unemployment (Sharma, 2019). Lala's husband accepted, *"My mind fires when I'm idle. Drinking helps me cope. I drink to make hunger and failure vanish. There's a quarrel at home."* His wife said that he drinks and shouts at us. I asked why he was wasting money on liquor, and in response, he threw the plate. Kids get frightened. Sometimes he doesn't come home at night. Bidi and local alcohol addict mother-in-law said, *"I cannot do hazira duties anymore. My body aches. I feel better only with Bidi and Daru."* Generational addiction and male drinking compounded the household's financial problems. Money made was usually spent on liquor, leaving children without food and medical care.

Migration to Bangalore: Due to food shortages and domestic violence, the young man traveled to Bangalore with a labour contractor. Outmigration from Assam's tea garden workers has surged recently into unskilled jobs in construction, hotels, and factories (Das, 2021). *"If I stay here, we all die,"* the wife said, referring to what her husband had told her. The husband explained, *"Working in Bangalore is difficult. We get to work on construction every day, moving bricks and mixing cement. But drinking follows me here, too. Sometimes I cannot save anything."* This migration, instead of stabilising the household, widened the emotional distance. The wife was left with double responsibility, earning through domestic work and caring for her children and ailing mother-in-law.

Poverty, health, and gendered burden: The family living condition is an illustration of the complex intersection of poverty, disease, and gendered responsibilities. The wife has the heaviest burdens of managing money, childcare, and elder care. She pointed to the lack of access to healthcare, *"My daughter had a fever for three days. I had no money to take her to the hospital".* The mother-in-law conveyed her sorrow, saying, *"I cough blood sometimes, but who will take me to the hospital? My son is away, and my daughter-in-law has no time. I just want to die soon."*

Case Study-3

Family composition and economic dependence: Mina, a 36-year-old casual labourer, has worked as a tea leaf plucker for 12 years for Rs 250 in normal conditions. Mina's family is multi-generational and interdependent. She has three daughters, 16, 14, and 5 years old; two sons, 12 and 7 years old; and one 5-year-old daughter with cerebral palsy, who needs constant medical care. She lives with her husband, an irregular wage labourer who is also an alcoholic, and her aged in-laws, who are bedridden with severe health complications. Mina said, "When jobs are scarce, we borrow." This drought made it difficult for all to borrow. Her story is a chilling example of the fragility of short-term farm work and the lack of a financial cushion in times of emergency. Mina's experiences highlight how the gendered inequalities of the plantation labour systems intensify the difficulties faced by women in wagework and caregiving.

Climate shock and employment loss: The unseasonal drought in February–April 2023 further exacerbated the household's vulnerability. Tea bushes sensitive to climate produced fewer leaves. Estate management suspended temporary laborers, the lowest rung of plantation employment, but kept permanent workers. The manager said, "Come back when the rains come." Loss of a job depletes the home supply of food immediately. The oldest daughter, 16-year-old Rita, described the food shortage: "We ate rice with water and salt for days. My siblings begged for food, but vegetables were out of reach for Maa. This testimony highlights the relationship between climatic uncertainty, work insecurity, and dietary hardship.

Cyclic vulnerabilities: Personal health, finances, domestic violence. Loss of money increased vulnerabilities. There was no family health care. The in-laws, unable to receive medical care due to their disabilities, had to discontinue the youngest child's cerebral palsy therapy. In the absence of institutional credit, families with plantation holdings often borrow from informal moneylenders at too high rates of interest, 10 per cent per month, thereby getting trapped in debt. Mina said her husband's drinking worsened after he lost his job. "When I tried to get him to go out and get a job, he would beat me and drink even more." Economic shocks could increase gender-based violence through male discontent and loss of power. This violence is a threat to women, and they are unable to plan for household survival.

Distress migration as the last resort: Starvation and lack of job opportunities force Mina into distress migration. She sent her eldest daughter Rita to work in a textile mill in West Bengal, leaving her other children with her crippled in-laws. "I miss school, but someone has to work," said Rita, who dropped out of school to help her family. "If Father spends all the money, who will look after my brothers and sisters?" Her story is one of the many that show how economic disruptions push young people, especially girls, out of school and into the labour market prematurely. This story highlights the generational poverty, ignorance, and labour exploitation faced by families.

Discussion

Case studies of Anita, Lala and Mina illustrate the multiple layers of vulnerability of workers on Assam tea plantations. Irregular rainfall and droughts harm livelihoods. Women also suffer pay discrimination and neglect of caring and the welfare system, which increase these anxieties. Distress migration is linked to health risks, such as starvation and alcoholism, exposing families to exploitation and lowering the quality of children's education. These findings highlight structural gaps in climate adaptation, labour rights and social safety nets, calling for gender-sensitive, climate-responsive measures. The analytical reflections on these cases are elaborated in the subsequent discussion.

Reflections of case study-1: Anita's story is an illustration of risks posed to livelihoods dependent on tea production due to climate vulnerability. Long periods of drought limit tea production, which leads to food shortages and economic hardship. Research has shown that livelihoods that are climate-sensitive are highly vulnerable to environmental shocks (Ethical Consumer, 2020). The study also shows the precarious employment conditions, particularly for women in temporary jobs. Female tea plantation workers often have precarious employment, poor wages, and few rights, with no access to official protections (Oxfam, 2019). The plantation laborers (particularly temporary workers) are central to the economic development of Assam. However, these workers face systematic marginalization and deprivation of basic amenities (Rajbangshi and Nambiar, 2020). Gendered exclusion deepens stigma and economically marginalizes vulnerable women like Anita. Research has shown that women working on plantations face discrimination, physical and psychological abuse, and a lack of autonomy (ILO, 2008). Many families have Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards but are unable to meet their nutritional needs and basic health service (Oxfam, 2019). Housing, sanitation, food supply, and healthcare are structural issues that harm the physical and mental health of female plantation workers (Rajbangshi and Nambiar, 2020).

Debt and exploitation hold many people in cycles of poverty (Rabby, 2012). Migration for survival frequently endangers mothers and their offspring. The economic collapse in rural India, caused by drought, has led to urban migration, undermining traditional support systems and rendering migrants susceptible to exploitation. The tea garden villages of Assam have been systematically exploited since the colonial era, characterised by poor school enrolment among children and insufficient health care; hence, continuing cycles of exclusion. Thus, environmental degradation undermines livelihoods; key services remain inaccessible; debt traps hinder recovery; migration introduces further dangers; and these elements collectively intensify intergenerational poverty.

Reflections of case study-2: Lala's story is a reflection of the uncertainty of climate change and the livelihood vulnerability of temporary tea workers. Long dry spells disrupt tealeaf plucking and lower earnings for casual labourers. Climate variability has resulted in a decrease of up to 40% of Assam tea harvests in some plantations,

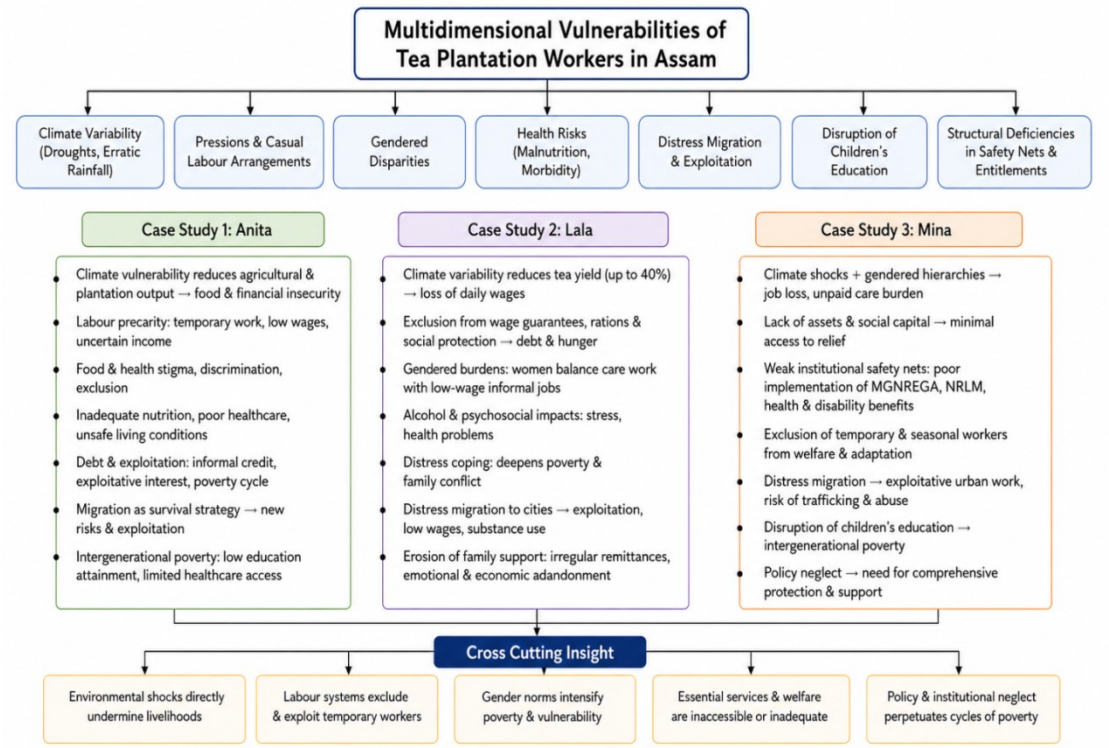
reducing the salaries of thousands of workers, according to the Tea Board of India (2022). Scholars indicate that informal labourers have no coverage for salary guarantees, rations, and social safeguards, leaving them hungry and in debt during climate shocks (Baruah, 2020; Dutta & Sarma, 2021). Such exclusion deepens poverty for families, as they depend on small, erratic supplemental incomes, such as the domestic employment of the wife, to meet their nutritional and educational needs. The wife's breadwinning and care roles expose the gendered consequences of economic precarity. Research has revealed that 68% of the temporary tea workers in Assam are women, who suffer from salary discrimination, inadequate healthcare, and few maternity benefits (Sharma, 2019). The mother-in-law's depression ("Better if I die soon") is evidence of older tea women, often denied welfare benefits, straining resource-constrained homes (Das, 2021). These stories show how systemic differences multiply gendered vulnerability across generations.

The husband's comment, "I drink to forget hunger," is consistent with research in which it is observed that unemployed tea laborers in Assam turn towards substance addiction as a form of coping (Sharma, 2019). Alcohol temporarily reduces hunger and sorrow but reduces household resilience. Alcohol eats up scarce resources as domestic violence and family conflict rise. He threw the dish… Children feel scared. His wife highlights the psychological stress that children in alcohol-affected families experience, which can lead to a cycle of poverty and unhealthy relationships. Migration is often considered a survival strategy, but Lala's family stayed poor. The migration of unskilled migrants or migrants with insecure contracts puts them at risk of exploitation, low wages, and substance abuse (Dutta & Sarma, 2021). "Drinking brought me here… I can't preserve anything," her husband confessed, showing how migration moves risks to cities. The wife's claim, "He promised to send money but only once," reflects structural labor governance and social security challenges that weaken family and spousal assistance during distress migration. Lala's story is a microcosm of the multiple vulnerabilities in the tea sector—collapse of livelihoods due to environmental factors, structural inequities on the basis of gender, substance use as a coping mechanism as well as a destructive force, and the futility of migration as a long-term solution. These interconnected issues reflect systemic neglect and the importance of climate-sensitive worker protections, gender-sensitive welfare policies, and community-based health and addiction services.

Reflections of case study-3: Mina's narrative illustrates how the tea-sector women are made vulnerable by climate variability and gendered labour inequalities. When drought or uncertain rains reduce production, women, like other temporary workers, are the first to lose their jobs. Research shows that women working in the tea plantations of Assam do not have savings, social capital or government relief programmes, which further make them more vulnerable to livelihood loss (Sharma, 2019; Baruah, 2020). Mina's story shows how household problems get worse without strong institutional safety nets. Very few national programmes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM) are implemented in the tea-growing regions due to

administrative negligence and lack of understanding (Dutta & Sarma, 2021). Rajbangshi and Nambiar (2020) stated that plantation workers are deprived of climate change mitigation and welfare measures, particularly temporary female workers, thereby increasing structural marginalisation. Mina's case shows this exclusion: she received no money when she lost her job, no insurance when she fell sick and no disability support even though her family needed it.

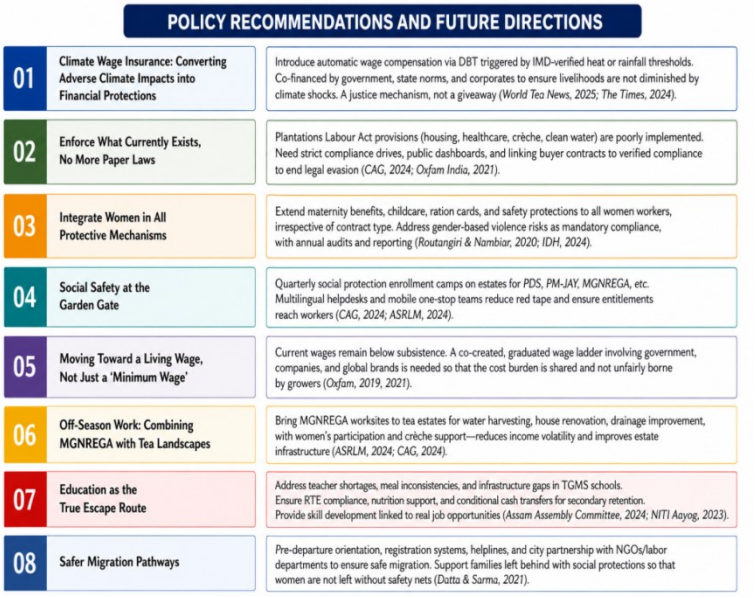
Mina's family had no choice but to flee when the plantation income dried up. Migration exposes women and children to unregulated urban labour markets, which are characterised by low wages, hazardous conditions and limited rights (Dutta & Sarma, 2021). With regular travel, family ties break up, children are looked after by relatives or left unsupervised, and adults work in exploitative conditions (Baruah, 2020). Mina's case shows how uncertain life is for people living on tea estates. Climate disruptions destabilise fragile economies. Migration creates new forms of exploitation. Women face greater difficulties because of gender stereotypes. The dynamics highlight the neglect of plantation workers in the state policy and the need for a holistic strategy and welfare programmes.



Finally, the three case studies show the much vulnerability of women laborers on tea plantations. Erratic rains and dry spells halt tea harvesting and eliminate temporary laborers' income (Tea Board of India, 2022; Baruah, 2020). Labor exclusion deprives casual workers of income guarantees, housing, food, and healthcare, exacerbating climate-induced precarity (Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020; Oxfam, 2019). In all the cases, the gender difference is apparent. Women in insecure plucking jobs often face

income disparity, childcare, and institutional neglect (Sharma, 2019). Whereas Anita's widowhood is marked by stigmas, women like Lala and Mina are breadwinners and caretakers. Elderly women are excluded from welfare programs (Das, 2021). Malnutrition, inadequate healthcare, and drunkenness are also cited. Alcohol fuels unstable households and promotes violence while coping (Sharma, 2019). Distress migration is a frequent survival strategy but rarely increases resilience. It forces families into urban exploitation, hazardous work, risks of trafficking, and family separation (Dutta & Sarma, 2021) and disruptions in child education (UNICEF, 2023). Anita's, Lala's, and Mina's tragedies are the consequence of policy failures such as climate adaptation, labor rules, gender-blind welfare programs, and social security networks. They call for climate-responsive, gender-sensitive, and inclusive tea sector policies for women plantation workers.

Policy Recommendations and Future Directions: The case studies highlight the significance of climate-pay insurance to protect workers against heatwaves and droughts. The insurance will be a mix of government and corporate co-financing to increase pay in response to extreme weather events while recognising the economic impact on low-income workers. We need to implement the Plantations Labour Act to ensure adequate housing, healthcare, and childcare. Non-operating facilities and unfulfilled obligations are signs of compliance deficiencies. The imposition of such regulations and the construction of transparency dashboards would protect workers' rights. Maternity benefits and childcare arrangements for temporary employees and labour protections for women Legislation on gender-based violence should be enforced. They are important to the welfare initiatives and to improving social safety for on-site female tea labourers. The study calls for a living wage and argues that stakeholders need to come together to end the cycle of debt and poverty. MGNREGA can be dovetailed with tea estate operations to generate off-season income and improve infrastructure. Education reform should tackle recruiting local teachers, facilities, and retention through conditional cash transfers to break the poverty cycle. Finally, safe migration



pathways mean less exploitation during survival migration and better regulation and care for families left behind, ensuring social protections.

Conclusion

The present case studies showed that climate uncertainty, institutional exclusion, and gender disparities perpetuate cycles of poverty in tea industry. Unpredictable rainfall and droughts impact the livelihoods of temporary workers (Tea Board of India, 2022). These shocks disproportionately affect women due to inequitable caregiving duties, unequal pay, and limited access to healthcare. Insufficient provision of social safety nets is consistently a significant issue. Despite the presence of MGNREGA and NRLM, tea plantation households are excluded from unemployment, disability, and health benefits (Dutta & Sarma, 2021; Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020). Food shortages, indebtedness, and distress migration are the absence of governmental force that drives families into informal work and exploitative urban markets. Lala and Mina's distress migration illustrates how coping mechanisms can lead to increased vulnerability. Migrant workers face unsafe working conditions, substance abuse, and exploitation in the cities, while their families suffer from social and emotional breakdowns (Das, 2021; Dutta & Sarma, 2021). These stories are in urgent need of being addressed in policy integration. First, climate adaptation must include plantation communities and provide security for climate shocks. Second, maternity benefits, childcare support, and women's healthcare are necessary to alleviate the unequal burden on female workers (ILO, 2008). Third, there is a need for migration governance to protect workers from exploitative labour and to support families. Finally, education and nutrition are necessary for the children of tea workers to break intergenerational cycles of poverty (Oxfam, 2019).

In a nutshell, the lived experiences of Anita, Lala, and Mina illustrate that poverty and precarity on tea fields are a product of institutional neglect and governmental exclusion, rather than individual misfortune. Addressing these complex vulnerabilities requires a comprehensive, climate-responsive, and gender-equitable strategy that incorporates labor rights, social security initiatives, and developmental strategies.

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Ancient Indian Views on Disability through the Eyes of Today's Disabled Individuals

Dr. Ritwika Rajendara[1]
Mazida Khatun[2]

Abstract

This paper will explore how disability was understood in ancient India and how people with disabilities feel today about those old beliefs. In old Indian stories and texts like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, people with disabilities were often shown as being punished for wrongdoings in past lives. Some were shown as wise and powerful, but others were blamed or looked down upon. These old stories still affect how people in India think about disability today. Many families and communities still believe in karma and see disability as a result of past sins. This leads to discrimination, pity, or shame. But now, people with disabilities are speaking up. They want to be seen with respect and dignity. Some are also finding strength in old stories, like that of Sage Ashtavakra, who was physically different but very wise. This paper brings together these ideas and shows how we can connect old traditions with modern values like equality, rights, and respect. The goal is to make a society where people with disabilities are included and valued.

Keywords: *Disability, Ancient India, Karma, Equality, Rights, Social Beliefs, Inclusion*

Introduction

Disability is a concept that has evolved significantly across cultures and historical contexts. In India, the understanding of disability has long been influenced by religious beliefs, mythological narratives, and philosophical discourses that stretch back thousands of years. Ancient Indian scriptures such as the Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata have portrayed characters with disabilities in ways that are deeply symbolic, often linking physical or mental impairments to metaphysical ideas such as karma, dharma, and rebirth. These representations continue to shape societal attitudes toward disability, despite the growing global emphasis on human rights and inclusion.

This paper aims to examine the ancient Indian views on disability through the eyes of disabled individuals living in today's society. The intersection of ancient beliefs and modern experiences provides a unique lens through which we can understand both the continuity and transformation of cultural attitudes. This investigation is particularly

[1] Dr. Ritwika Rajendara, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar. Email: ritwika.rajendra@gmail.com

[2] Mazida Khatun, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar. Email: mazida96.mk@gmail.com

relevant in a society like India's, where ancient traditions coexist with contemporary ideals and where disability rights movements are gaining visibility and momentum.

Historically, ancient Indian thought did not offer a uniform perspective on disability. Some narratives celebrated the wisdom and spiritual strength of individuals with disabilities, such as Sage Ashtavakra, who was physically deformed but revered for his intellect. In contrast, other depictions, such as those of Manthara in the Ramayana or Shakuni in the Mahabharata, associated disability with negative character traits, thereby reinforcing stigma. These contrasting portrayals reflect the dual nature of ancient Indian attitudes: on one hand, a reverence for the inner soul, and on the other, a tendency to equate physical appearance with moral or spiritual failings.

The doctrine of karma, a cornerstone of Hindu philosophy, has had a profound influence on the social construction of disability. According to this belief, disability is often interpreted as a result of misdeeds in past lives. While this idea can offer a sense of explanation or meaning, it has also contributed to social exclusion, discrimination, and the internalization of shame among disabled individuals. Scholars such as Addlakha (2007) and Ghai (2002) have pointed out that such interpretations often shift the focus from structural barriers to individual morality, thereby undermining the fight for equality and accessibility.

In contemporary India, disabled individuals encounter a complex mix of reverence, pity, exclusion, and activism. Many families continue to believe in karmic causes of disability, leading to hidden lives and limited opportunities for the disabled. At the same time, modern disability rights discourse—rooted in the social model of disability—challenges these notions by emphasizing environmental barriers, systemic inequalities, and the importance of agency and empowerment.

The voices of disabled people themselves are central to this study. While policy documents like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016) and international frameworks like the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) provide legal backing, cultural perceptions play an equally critical role in the lived experiences of disabled individuals. The present research adopts a mixed-methods approach to explore these dynamics, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to capture both statistical trends and personal narratives.

Preliminary findings suggest that ancient views on disability continue to influence contemporary life, often in subconscious or indirect ways. For instance, religious ceremonies may still exclude disabled persons, or families may interpret a child's disability through a karmic lens. Yet, many disabled individuals are also reclaiming these narratives—drawing inspiration from figures like Ashtavakra or challenging negative portrayals through activism and art.

This paper also seeks to contribute to a broader academic and social dialogue. By revisiting ancient texts through a disability studies perspective, we can critique traditional narratives while also discovering empowering elements that resonate with today's disabled communities. Furthermore, this approach encourages an inclusive

reinterpretation of Indian heritage, one that honors the past while committing to a more equitable future.

Objectives

1. To find out how disability was perceived in old Indian stories and scriptures.
2. To understand the feelings of people about old beliefs like karma and rebirth and whether these still affecting disabled people or not?

Research Methodology

This study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research to gain a deeper understanding.

Quantitative Method A structured questionnaire was given to 35 disabled individuals. The survey included multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions on:

- Awareness of ancient Indian stories featuring disabled individuals
- Belief in karma and rebirth
- Experiences of social stigma
- Participation in religious or cultural life

Qualitative Method In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 participants to understand their personal views. Questions included:

- How do you feel about disability in ancient stories?
- Have these stories influenced people to treat?
- What should be done to improve society's attitude?

Key Themes from Interviews:

- Some participants found characters like Sage Ashtavakra inspiring.
- Others said stories like Manthara and Shakuni promoted negative stereotypes.
- Most wanted society to reinterpret old stories to promote dignity and respect.

Data analysis and interpretation:

Qualitative Analysis

How Disability Was Viewed in Ancient India

Religious Stories and Characters Ancient texts include both positive and negative depictions of disability:

- **Dhritarashtra** (blind king): Seen as lacking vision and moral judgment.
- **Shakuni** (limping prince): Shown as a cunning and negative character.
- **Manthara** (hunchbacked servant): Blamed for major conflicts.
- **Sage Ashtavakra** (body deformed in 8 places): Highly respected for his wisdom.

Belief in Karma and Rebirth People believed disability was the result of misdeeds in a previous life. This view led to stigma and exclusion.

Ancient Medicine (Ayurveda) Ayurvedic texts treated disability as a condition to be cured, not accommodated. There was little focus on rights or inclusion.

Influence of Ancient Views in Today's Society.

Social Stigma Even now, some people think disability is caused by bad karma. This leads to discrimination and pity.

Cultural Practices Disabled individuals are sometimes not allowed to take part in religious events or festivals.

Emotional Impact- This belief system can make disabled individuals feel unworthy, which lowers self-esteem and confidence.

Quantitative Analysis

Participant Responses to Ancient Indian Stories

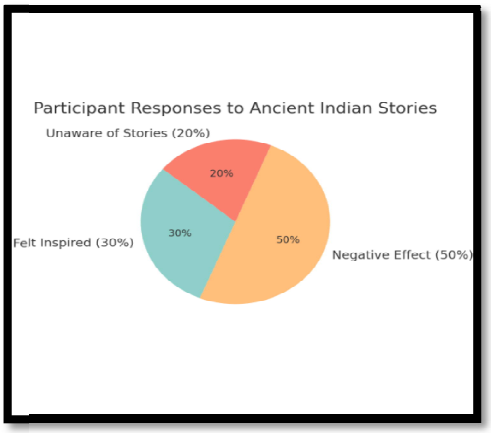


Chart no: 1

This chart illustrates how disabled individuals today feel about ancient Indian stories related to disability. A significant portion felt negatively affected by societal interpretations of these stories, while some found them inspiring, and others were unaware of such references.

Belief / Experience Category

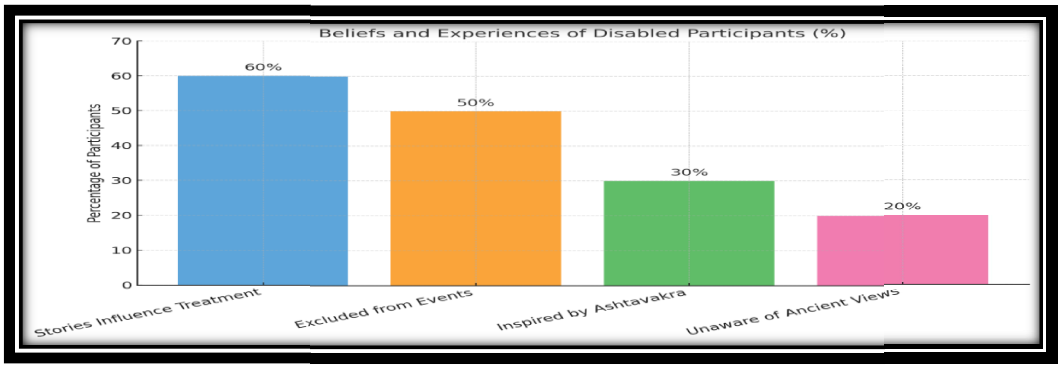


Chart No: 2

About 60% of the participants said that they feel ancient stories continue to influence how people view and treat them, often connecting disability with bad karma or punishment from a past life. Additionally, 50% of respondents reported feeling excluded from social and religious events, either due to superstitions or lack of accessible infrastructure. On a more positive note, 30% of the participants shared that they feel inspired by figures like Sage Ashtavakra, who despite having physical deformities, was respected for his wisdom and spirituality. These stories offer hope and a sense of identity for many. However, 20% of the respondents said they were not aware of any ancient references to disability, suggesting a gap in cultural knowledge or exposure to such narratives. Together, these findings highlight both the negative and positive impacts of traditional beliefs on the lives of disabled individuals in modern India.

Comparison of Male Female Responses

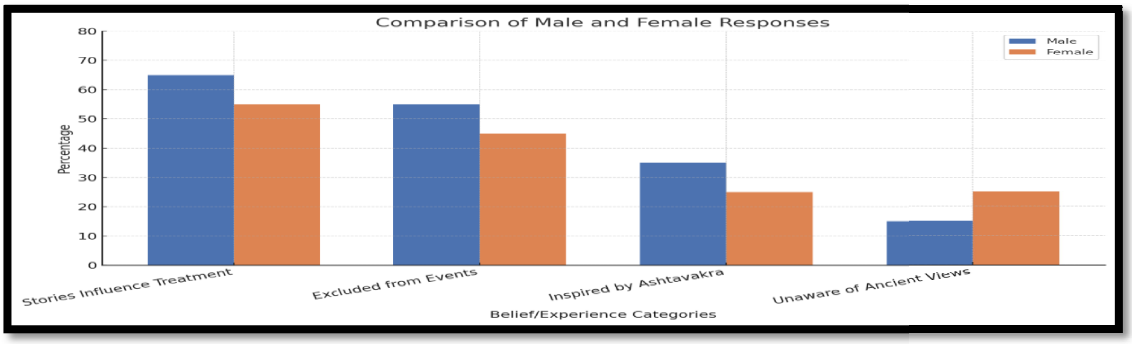


Chart no: 3

The analysis shows that gender differences played a subtle role in how participants perceived ancient Indian views on disability. Male respondents reported feeling a slightly stronger influence from ancient stories and were more likely to draw inspiration from figures like Sage Ashtavakra. In contrast, female participants more frequently expressed feelings of exclusion from social or religious events and were more likely to be unaware of ancient references to disability. These differences suggest that societal messaging and access to cultural knowledge may vary between genders, potentially affecting how men and women interpret and experience traditional narratives.

Findings

The study found that 60% of the participants still feel that ancient Indian stories and beliefs about disability strongly influence how society views and treats them today. Many respondents reported that these traditional narratives, often linking disability to bad karma or punishment from past lives, continue to shape public attitudes and the way people approach them. Alongside this, 50% of participants expressed that they often feel excluded from social and religious events, either due to superstitions or the lack of accessible spaces for disabled individuals. Interestingly, 30% of the participants revealed that they found strength and inspiration from figures like Sage Ashtavakra, who was respected for his wisdom despite having a physical deformity. However, 20% of the participants admitted to being unaware of any ancient Indian references to disability, indicating a significant knowledge gap.

The study also uncovered gender differences in the responses. Male participants were more likely to report that they felt inspired by ancient stories and experienced a stronger influence from these narratives. On the other hand, female participants were more likely to express feelings of exclusion and ignorance regarding ancient views on disability. This suggests that gender plays a role in how disability is perceived and experienced, with women potentially facing additional societal barriers. The study found a division between rural and urban participants. Rural individuals were more likely to encounter stigma based on religious beliefs, while urban participants highlighted physical barriers and social exclusion as their main challenges.

Conclusion

The study illustrates that while ancient Indian views on disability continue to influence societal perceptions today, these influences are both negative and positive. While some ancient stories perpetuate stigma and exclusion, others, such as those surrounding Sage Ashtavakra, offer a source of inspiration and strength. This duality underscores the importance of reinterpreting and reframing ancient narratives to highlight the dignity and potential of individuals with disabilities. The study emphasizes the importance of education, accessibility, and inclusive practices in combating stigma and exclusion. By promoting awareness, changing societal

attitudes, and ensuring physical accessibility, we can create a society that not only acknowledges the contributions of disabled individuals but also fosters a more inclusive and supportive environment for all.

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Life Skills and Academic Achievement of High School Students in Shillong, Meghalaya

Wankmenlang Kharbuli[1]
Prof. C. Devendiran[2]
Prof. A. Muthulakshmi[3]

Abstract

Life skills are vital for adolescents because they help them manage their day-to-day challenges. They also help them make the right decisions, develop healthy relationships, and cope with emotional and social pressures. The present study examined life skills and academic achievement among high school students in the selected schools in Shillong, Meghalaya. A cross-sectional and descriptive research design was used. The study included 120 respondents from classes 9 and 10, with 40 respondents selected from each of three schools representing high-, average-, and low-achievement levels based on their academic performance. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire integrating the Life Skill Assessment Scale (LSAS). The data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and correlation analysis. The findings revealed that self-awareness had the highest mean score, followed by decision-making and interpersonal relationships. Coping with stress projected the lowest mean score, indicating an area requiring more attention.

Further, differences were also observed in life-skill dimensions between class 9 and class 10 students and among the students from schools with different levels of academic achievement. Academic achievement showed significant negative relationships with self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Remaining skill dimensions were also positively correlated with one another. The paper emphasizes the importance of integrating life-skills education into secondary schooling. The paper suggests that strengthening students' coping, communication, decision-making, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities, with support from teachers, parents, and social work professionals, can complement academic learning and promote students' holistic development.

Keywords*: Life Skills, Academic Achievement, Well-being, Holistic Development*

Introduction

Life skills are abilities that enable individuals to adopt adaptive and positive behaviours and to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life (Weisen et al., 1994). They promote mental well-being and competence among young

[1] Wankmenlang Kharbuli, Former M.Phil scholar, Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl- 796 004 Email ID:kmenlangjoy@gmail.com

[2] Prof. C. Devendiran, Professor. Department of Social Work, Mizoram University, Aizawl – 796 004 Email ID:mzut082@mzu.edu.in

[3] Prof. A. Muthulakshmi, Professor, Department of Public Administration, Mizoram University, Aizawl – 796 004 Email ID: muthumzu@gmail.com

people as they respond to everyday realities and challenges (Khera & Khosla, 2011). Life skills encompass psychosocial competencies and interpersonal abilities which enable individuals to make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, establish healthy relationships, empathise with others, and manage their lives in healthy and productive ways.

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 1997) defines life skills as "*the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.*" Similarly, UNICEF (2011) conceptualises life skills as a "*behaviour-change or development approach that balances knowledge, attitudes, and skills".*

Gomes and Marques (2013) stressed that life skills can be learned and applied in everyday situations, enabling individuals to function successfully in different environments. These skills perhaps behavioural, cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. They comprise effective time management, managing negative thoughts, resolving interpersonal conflicts, and setting personal goals.

Life skills education is particularly relevant during adolescence, a period characterised by significant physical, psychological, social, and educational transitions. In contemporary society, young people are expected to respond effectively to rapid change and actively participate in their own learning and development. Life skills therefore extend beyond academic knowledge. They involve applying knowledge, values, attitudes, and competencies that contribute to individual development, lifelong learning, responsible behaviour, healthy relationships, and quality of life. They are not synonymous with survival, livelihood, or vocational skills, although they contribute to the effective use of such skills.

Review of Literature

Sudha (2024) discussed Life Skills among adolescent students in the Higher Secondary class in her study. The study of the Life Skills of Higher Secondary students in relation to their academic achievement was undertaken to examine these skills. Agadi (2022) examined the relationship between life skills and academic achievements of secondary school students. 240 secondary school students (120 boys and 120 girls) were selected as the study sample from Mysore, Karnataka. The study found a positive correlation between life skills and the academic achievement of secondary school students. Moreover, girls scored higher on both life skills and academic achievement compared to boys. The researcher recommended that teachers play a longer role in developing life skills, especially for boys, through new teaching methods and dedicated classrooms. Developing these life skills can be a valuable tool for improving students' success. Meenu and Rani (2021) conducted a study on life skills among secondary school students and found significant differences between boys and girls in cognitive and interpersonal skills.

Mahmoudi and Moshayedi (2012), in their study on life skills education in secondary education, highlighted the importance of life skills programmes in promoting the health and well-being of young people. These programmes address adolescents' developmental needs and strengthen their ability to respond constructively to behavioural and social challenges.

Education is equally vital to individuals for social development. It instils knowledge, skills, values, and confidence that enable individuals to participate effectively in society. In education, academic achievement is a significant component and is regularly assessed through marks, grades, or examination performance. Sahu Sudhir (2012) defines academic achievement as the level of attainment in school subjects such as language, mathematics, and science, as reflected in students' marks or grades.

Varghese (2005) discussed how students are emotionally or otherwise pressured to meet expectations about academic performance. Kaplan, Liu, and Kaplan (2005) again pointed out that poor academic performance leads to a stressful learning experience.

In this background, life skills have an important role in supporting students' academic and personal development. Fallahchai (2012) found that academic and life-skills instruction could improve students' academic achievement. Similarly, Raymond et al. (2011) suggested that students' perceptions of academic competence may be strengthened when teachers demonstrate care, commitment, and confidence in their abilities. Aparna and Raakhee (2011) also highlighted the role of life skills in empowering young people to engage in positive behaviours, protect their well-being, and establish productive interpersonal relationships.

Earlier research has established the role of life skills in adolescents' psychosocial well-being, positive behaviour, relationships, and personal development; however, limited attention has been paid to their relationship with academic achievement. Evidence is particularly limited regarding high school students in Shillong, Meghalaya, where familial, parental, socioeconomic, and school contexts may influence students' development and educational experiences. Few studies have examined variations in life skills across classes and schools with different levels of academic achievement. The present study addresses these gaps by assessing students' life skills and academic achievement, examining differences across classes and schools, and analysing the relationship between life skills and academic achievement within the local context.

Statement of the Problem

Adolescents experience substantial academic, social, emotional, and interpersonal demands during high school. Although academic achievement is an important indicator of educational success, life skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, communication, interpersonal relationships, empathy, and emotional management are also essential for effective learning and adjustment. However, educational settings

may emphasise examination performance while giving less attention to these psychosocial competencies. Limited empirical evidence exists on the level of life skills and their relationship with academic achievement among high school students in Shillong, Meghalaya. The present study therefore examines students' life skills, academic achievement, relevant socio-demographic and family characteristics, and variations across classes and schools.

Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design. The study population comprised adolescent students studying in Classes 9 and 10 in three selected schools in Shillong. Students were purposively selected from the schools, followed by stratified disproportionate sampling based on the schools' academic achievement in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) examination conducted by the Meghalaya Board of School Education. The final sample comprised 120 students, with 40 students selected from each school.

Primary data were collected quantitatively using a structured questionnaire incorporating the Life Skill Assessment Scale (LSAS), developed by Nair et al. (2009), administered at the Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth and Development. The instrument was assessed for feasibility and reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.71 and a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.696, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Secondary data were obtained from books, journals, magazines, and relevant scholarly articles.

Data were entered and analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise the respondents' characteristics and life-skills scores. Correlation analysis was employed to examine the relationship between students' life skills and academic achievement.

Definitions and Concepts

Life skills

Life skills were assessed among adolescent students in terms of self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, creative and critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, and coping with emotions and stress.

Academic achievement: Academic achievement refers to the percentage of marks obtained by students of Classes 9 and 10 in their previous examinations, namely Class 8 and Class 9, respectively. Students were classified as: High achievers: 60 % and above, Average achievers: 45% to below 60%, and Low achievers: Below 45%.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents. They comprised 60 students from Class 9 and 60 from Class 10. According to the reported age distribution, almost two-fifths (39.2) were in the 12–14-year group, more than half (55.8) in the 15–18-year group, and 5.0 per cent were 19 years or older.

In terms of tribal identity, more than two-fifths (42.5) of respondents belonged to the General category, more than two-fifths (41.7) were Khasi, 6.7 per cent were Garo, 5.8 per cent belonged to other tribal groups, and 3.3 per cent were Jaintia. Regarding religion, half (50.8) were Christian, less than one-third (30.8) were Hindu, 2.5 per cent were Muslim, and more than one-tenth (15.9) belonged to other religious groups. Among Christian respondents, the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Roman Catholic denominations accounted for one-fourth (25.0), 6.7 per cent, and 10.8 per cent, respectively, while about half (46.7) were not applicable to the denomination category.

Table 1: Profile of the Respondents

Characteristics	Class		Total N =120
	9th n =60	10th n = 60	
Age in Years			
12 to 14	16 (26.7)	31(51.7)	47(39.2)
15 to 18	40(66.7)	27(45.0)	67(55.8)
19 above	4(6.7)	2(3.3)	6(5.0)
Tribe			
General	26(43.3)	25(41.7)	51(42.5)
Khasi	24(40.0)	26(43.3)	50(41.7)
Jaintia	3(5.0)	1(1.7)	4(3.3)
Garo	4(6.7)	4(6.7)	8 (6.7)
Any other	3(5.0)	4(6.7)	7(5.8)
Religion			
Christian	27(22.5)	34(28.3)	6150.8)
Hindu	23(19.2)	14(11.7)	3730.8)
Muslim	3(2.5)	0(0.0)	3(2.5)
Khasi	3(2.5)	5(4.2)	8(6.7)

Any other	4(3.3)	7(5.8)	11(9.2)
Denomination			
Not applicable	30(50.0)	26(43.3)	56(46.7)
Presbyterian	12(20.0)	18(30.0)	30(25.0)
Baptist	4(6.7)	4(6.7)	8(6.7)
Roman Catholic	5(8.3)	81(3.3)	13(10.8)
other	9(15.0)	4(6.7)	13(10.8)

Source: Computed Figures in parentheses are percentages

Familial Characteristics of the Respondents'

Table 2 shows the familial characteristics of the respondents, including the type of family, forms of family, and family size. More than half (51.7) of the respondents live in a nuclear family, whereas less than half (48.3) live in a joint family. In terms of family form, the majority (81.7) of respondents belong to a stable family, while less than one-fifth (18) belong to a separated family.

Table 2: Respondents' Familial Characteristics

Characteristics	Class		Total N =120
	9^{th} n =60	10^{th} n = 60	
Family type			
Joint	31 (51.7)	27 (45.0)	58 (48.3)
Nuclear	29 (48.3)	33 (55.0)	62 (51.7)
Form of family			
Stable	49 (81.7)	49 (81.7)	98 (81.7)
Separated	11 (18.3)	11 (18.3)	22 (18.3)
Size of the family			
1 to 5	36 (60.0)	33 (55.0)	69 (57.5)
6 to 10	22 (36.7)	21 (35.0)	43 (35.8)
11 to 20	2 (3.3)	6 (10.0)	8 (6.7)

Source: Computed Figures in parentheses are percentages

Regarding the size of the family, the findings show that families with 1 to 5 members have the highest percentage of more than half (57.5), followed by families comprising 6 to 10 members of more than one-third (35.8), and only a few (6.7) respondents belong to families comprising 11 to 20 members.

Respondents' Parental Education and Occupational Characteristics

Table 3 shows the Respondents' Parental Education and occupational characteristics. The educational background of parents indicates that more than one-third (35.8%) of fathers had education below Class IX, one-third (34.2%) had education from Class IX to XII, one-fifth (19.2) were graduates, and 6.7 per cent were postgraduates or above. Among mothers, about half (47.5%) had education below Class X, 19.2 per cent had education from Class X to XII, one-fourth (23.3%) were graduates, and 5.8 per cent were postgraduates or above.

Regarding fathers' occupations, one-third (35.8%) were government employees, one-fourth (29.2%) were engaged in business, 24.2 percent were employed in the private sector, and 5.8percent were daily labourers. Among mothers, half of percent (51.7%) were homemakers, (23.3%) were government employees, 11.7%) were engaged in business, and one tenth (10.8) were in private employment.

These findings indicate variation in parental educational and occupational backgrounds, which form an important part of the social environment in which adolescents develop their academic and life skills.

Table 3 Respondents' Parental Education and Occupational Characteristics

Characteristics	Class		Total N=120
	9^{th} n=60	10^{th} n=60	
Fathers' Education			
No response	1(.8)	4(3.3)	5(4.2)
Below class X	23(19.2)	20(16.7)	43(35.8)
Class X to Class XII	18(15.0)	23(19.2)	41(34.2)
Graduate	14(11.7)	9(7.5)	23(19.2)
Post Graduate and above	4(3.3)	4(3.3)	8(6.7)
Father's Occupation			
No response	1(.8)	5(4.2)	6(5.0)
Business	23(19.2)	12(10.0)	35(29.2)
Government Servant	21(17.5)	22(18.3)	43(35.8)
Private Job	14(11.7)	15(12.5)	29(24.2)
Daily Labourer	1(.8)	6(5.0)	7(5.8)

Mother's Education			
No response	3(2.5)	1(.8)	4(3.3)
Below class X	26(21.7)	31(25.8)	57(47.5)
Class X to Class XII	11(9.2)	12(10.0)	23(19.2)
Graduate	17(14.2)	11(9.2)	28(23.3)
Postgraduate and above	2(1.7)	5(4.2)	7(5.8)
Mother's Occupation			
No response	2(1.7)	1(.8)	3(2.5)
Business	8(6.7)	6(5.0)	14(11.7)
Government Servant	15(12.5)	13(10.8)	2823.3)
Private Job	4(3.3)	9(7.5)	13(10.8)
Home Maker	31(25.8)	3125.8)	62(51.7)

Source: Computed Figures in parentheses are percentages

Economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 4: Respondents' Economic Characteristics

Characteristics	**Class**		**Total N=120**
	9th n=60	**10th n=60**	
SE Category			
APL	43(71.7)	41(68.3)	84(70.0)
BPL	16(26.7)	16(26.7)	32(26.7)
AAY	1(1.7)	3(5.0)	4(3.3)
The income of the family In Rs.			
Below 5000	17(28.3)	21(35.0)	38(31.7)
6000 to 15000	18(30.0)	16(26.7)	34(28.3)
16000 to 30000	11(18.3)	10(16.7)	21(17.5)
31000 above	14(23.3)	13(21.7)	27(22.5)
Households live in			
Owned	23(38.3)	26(43.3)	49(40.8)
Rented	37(61.7)	34(56.7)	71(59.2)
Type of house			
Kutcha/thatched	5(8.3)	8(13.3)	13(10.8)
Semi pucca	23 (38.3)	24 (40.0)	47 (39.2)
Pucca	31(51.7)	24(40.0)	55(45.8)
Others	1(1.7)	4(6.7)	5(4.2)

Source: Computed Figures in parentheses are percentages

Most respondents (70.0%) belonged to the Above Poverty Line (APL) category, (26.7%) to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category, and 3.3 percent to the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) category. Regarding family income, (31.7%) reported a family income below Rs. 5,000, (28.3%) reported Rs. 6,000–15,000, (17.5%) reported Rs. 16,000–30,000, and (22.5%) reported Rs. 31,000 or above. In terms of housing, (59.2%) lived in rented houses and 40.8) in owned houses. Regarding the type of house, (45.8%) lived in pucca houses, (39.2%) in semi-pucca houses, 10.8 percent in kutcha or thatched houses, and 4.2 percent in other housing types.

Life skills of High school students

The study assessed ten dimensions of life skills: self-awareness, decision-making, interpersonal relationships, empathy, critical thinking, coping with emotions, problem-solving, effective communication, creative thinking, and coping with stress. Table 5 shows the Descriptive Statistics of Life Skills of High School Students

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Life Skills of High School Students

Dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	120	20	48	36.13	5.278
Decision making	120	23	47	36.08	4.804
Interpersonal relationship	120	22	53	35.51	4.776
Empathy	120	23	46	34.89	5.037
Critical thinking	120	21	46	34.54	5.517
Coping with emotions	120	20	47	34.17	4.934
Problem-solving	120	18	62	31.28	5.434
Effective Communication	120	13	38	27.24	4.937
Creative thinking	120	14	34	25.22	4.263
Coping with stress	120	12	36	24.08	4.551

Source: Computed

.The highest mean score was observed for self-awareness (M = 36.13, SD = 5.278), followed by decision-making (M = 36.08, SD = 4.804), interpersonal relationships (M = 35.51, SD = 4.776), empathy (M = 34.89, SD = 5.037), and critical thinking (M = 34.54, SD = 5.517). Coping with emotions had a mean of 34.17 (SD = 4.934), while comparatively lower mean scores were observed for problem-solving (M = 31.28, SD = 5.434), effective communication (M = 27.24, SD = 4.937), creative thinking (M = 25.22, SD = 4.263), and coping with stress (M = 24.08, SD = 4.551).

Overall, self-awareness emerged as the strongest reported life-skill dimension, whereas coping with stress recorded the lowest mean score. The findings suggest the need for greater attention to students' ability to manage stress and develop effective coping mechanisms.

Comparison of Class by Life Skills

The comparison between Classes 9 and 10 indicates relatively small differences across most life-skill dimensions. Class 10 students recorded higher mean scores in self-awareness and decision-making, while Class 9 students recorded higher mean scores in interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, problem-solving, and coping with stress. The two groups showed broadly similar patterns in empathy, emotion regulation, effective communication, and creative thinking. Table 6 below shows the comparison of achievement between classes.

Table 6 Comparison of Achievement of Classes by Life Skills

Dimensions	9th Class n = 60		10th Class n = 60		Total N= 120	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self Awareness	35.97	6.194	36.28	4.215	36.13	5.278
Decision making	34.53	5.130	35.25	4.960	34.89	5.037
Interpersonal relationship	27.70	4.767	26.78	5.099	27.24	4.937
Empathy	35.15	4.050	35.87	5.416	35.51	4.776
Critical thinking	25.50	3.833	24.93	4.668	25.22	4.263
Coping with emotions	34.78	5.903	34.30	5.140	34.54	5.517
Problem-solving	36.25	4.140	35.90	5.417	36.08	4.804
Effective communication	31.18	4.714	31.37	6.109	31.28	5.434
Creative thinking	34.28	5.026	34.05	4.880	34.17	4.934
Coping with stress	24.25	4.796	23.90	4.325	24.08	4.551

Source: Computed

The findings suggest that life skills are present across both classes, although individual dimensions vary between Class 9 and Class 10. The original analysis reports an overall significant difference between the two classes in life skills; this statistical conclusion should be verified against the relevant inferential test and p-value before publication

Comparison of achievement of Schools by Life skills

In this category, the study compares life skills across high-achievement, average-achievement, and low-achievement schools. Table 7 shows the Comparison of Students' Achievement by Life Skills.

Table 7: Comparison of Students' Achievement by Life Skills.

Dimensions	High Achievement n=40		Average Achievement n = 40		Low Achievement n = 40		Total N = 120	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Self-Awareness	38.03	5.23	34.28	5.55	36.08	4.44	36.13	5.29
Decision making	36.55	5.05	33.00	3.58	35.13	5.70	34.89	5.04
Interpersonal relationship	27.23	4.02	28.38	5.73	26.13	4.77	27.24	4.94
Empathy	36.83	4.01	34.70	6.04	35.00	3.78	35.51	4.78
Critical thinking	25.15	4.34	25.30	4.26	25.20	4.29	25.22	4.26
Coping with emotions	35.53	5.04	32.20	6.41	35.90	4.21	34.54	5.52
Problem-solving	36.25	5.11	35.88	4.47	36.10	4.93	36.08	4.80
Effective communication	32.90	6.22	29.58	5.33	31.35	4.15	31.28	5.43
Creative thinking	36.75	4.65	34.00	4.73	31.75	4.17	34.17	4.93
Coping with stress	24.43	4.10	25.35	5.16	22.45	3.96	24.08	4.55

Source: Computed

The three selected schools were categorised as high-, average-, and low-achievement schools. Differences were observed across several life-skill dimensions. Students from the high-achievement school reported higher mean scores in self-awareness, decision-making, empathy, effective communication, and creative thinking than students from the average- and low-achievement schools. In contrast, students from the average-achievement school recorded higher scores in interpersonal relationships and coping with stress. The low-achievement school recorded a higher mean for coping with emotions than the average-achievement school. Critical thinking and problem-solving showed relatively similar scores across the three schools.

These findings indicate that school-level academic achievement is not uniformly associated with all life skills dimensions. While students in the high-achievement school demonstrated comparatively stronger scores in several areas, some psychosocial competencies were more prominent among students in average- or low-achievement settings. This reinforces the importance of examining life skills as multidimensional competencies rather than assuming that academic achievement automatically corresponds to higher proficiency in every life-skill domain.

Correlation Matrix of Life Skills and Academic Achievement

Table 8 shows the correlation matrix between life skills and academic achievement among the respondents. Correlation analysis revealed several statistically significant relationships between life skills and academic achievement. Academic achievement was negatively correlated with self-awareness ($r = -.262$, $p < .01$), empathy ($r = -.208$, $p < .05$), critical thinking ($r = -.301$, $p < .01$), and problem-solving ($r = -.213$, $p < .05$). The negative coefficients indicate that higher scores on these particular life-skill dimensions were associated with lower academic-achievement scores within this sample. However, these correlations should not be interpreted as causal relationships.

The life-skill dimensions were also significantly interrelated. Self-awareness was positively associated with empathy ($r = .333$), interpersonal relationships ($r = .375$), creative thinking ($r = .419$), critical thinking ($r = .378$), and problem-solving ($r = .423$), all at the 0.01 level. Self-awareness was also associated with decision-making ($r = .219$, $p < .05$).

Empathy was positively associated with interpersonal relationships ($r = .355$), critical thinking ($r = .300$), and problem-solving ($r = .416$). Effective communication was significantly associated with coping with stress ($r = .245$). Interpersonal relationships were positively associated with critical thinking ($r = .266$) and decision-making ($r = .231$). Creative thinking was associated with critical thinking ($r = .262$), while critical thinking was associated with decision-making ($r = .267$) and problem-solving ($r = .410$). Coping with emotions was positively associated with coping with stress ($r = .211$).

The pattern demonstrates that life skills function as interconnected psychosocial competencies. For example, self-awareness may coexist with stronger interpersonal, creative, critical-thinking, and problem-solving abilities. Similarly, critical thinking and problem-solving appear to be closely related. These relationships support the view that life skills should be developed through integrated educational approaches rather than as isolated competencies.

Table 8: Correlation Matrix of Life Skills and Academic Achievement

Sl. No.	Domain	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Academic profile	1										
2	Self-awareness	**-.262****	1									
3	Empathy	**-.208***	**.333****	1								

4	Effective communication	-.020	.011	-.042	1							
5	Interpersonal relationship	-.110	**.375****	**.355****	.151	1						
6	Creative thinking	-.078	**.378****	.159	.110	.078	1					
7	Critical thinking	**-.301****	**.419****	**.300****	.108	**.266****	**.262****	1				
8	Decision making	.042	**.219***	.165	.010	**.231***	.147	**.267****	1			
9	Problem solving	**-.213***	**.423****	***.416****	.051	.413**	.181*	***.410****	.163	1		
10	Coping with emotions	-.142	-.051	.143	.198*	.133	.088	.051	.130	.147	1	
11	Coping with Stress	.022	-.152	-.048	**.245****	-.080	-.017	-.120	-.050	-.167	**.211****	1

Source: computed *p<0.05 **p<0.01

Conclusion

Life skills are important components of adolescent development because they enable young people to respond constructively to personal, interpersonal, educational, and social challenges. The present study examined life skills and academic achievement among high school students in selected schools in Shillong, Meghalaya.

The respondents represented diverse social, religious, familial, educational, occupational, and economic backgrounds. More than half belonged to the reported 15–18-year age group, while Khasi and General-category respondents constituted substantial proportions of the sample. Most respondents lived in nuclear families, and the majority belonged to APL households. Parental educational and occupational backgrounds varied considerably.

Among the ten life-skill dimensions examined, self-awareness recorded the highest mean score, whereas coping with stress recorded the lowest. Differences between Class 9 and Class 10 students were observed across individual life-skill dimensions. Comparisons among schools with different levels of academic achievement also showed variation across dimensions. Students from the high-achievement school generally demonstrated stronger scores in several life skills, although some

competencies were higher among students from average- or low-achievement schools.

The correlation findings demonstrated significant negative associations between academic achievement and self-awareness, empathy, critical thinking, and problem-solving. At the same time, several life skills were positively interrelated, suggesting that these competencies develop as interconnected dimensions of adolescent functioning. The findings should therefore be interpreted within the context of the present sample and research design and should not be taken to establish causal relationships.

The study highlights the importance of incorporating life skills into secondary and higher-secondary education. Life-skills education can complement academic learning by strengthening self-awareness, critical and creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, communication, interpersonal relationships, and coping abilities. Teachers may require appropriate training to integrate these competencies into classroom and co-curricular activities.

Social work professionals can also contribute substantially to life-skills development through social casework, social group work, counselling, school-based interventions, and community-oriented programmes. Collaboration among schools, teachers, parents, social workers, and other professionals can create supportive environments in which adolescents develop both academic competencies and psychosocial skills. The following recommendations are based on the study's findings.

- **Integrate life-skills education into secondary education:** Life skills should receive systematic attention within school curricula, particularly self-awareness, critical and creative thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, communication, and stress management.
- **Strengthen teacher capacity:** Teachers should receive training to facilitate life-skills education and create supportive learning environments based on care, encouragement, trust, and respect for students' abilities.
- **Promote student well-being:** Schools should develop programmes that support adolescents' emotional well-being, coping abilities, interpersonal relationships, and positive behavioural development.
- **Strengthen the role of social work:** School social workers can use casework and group-work approaches to address students' personal, interpersonal, academic, and social needs and facilitate life-skills development.
- **Encourage further research:** Future studies should include larger and more diverse samples from different schools and socio-cultural settings to examine how life skills interact with academic achievement and other aspects of adolescent development.

Overall, the study reinforces the importance of viewing education as more than academic attainment. Developing life skills alongside academic competencies can

help adolescents become more confident, responsible, socially competent, and better equipped to respond constructively to the demands of contemporary society.

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Impact of Apiculture on Women's Empowerment: A Case Study from Sewapuri Block, Varanasi

Jagannath Mondal[1]
Dr. G. Albin Joseph[2]

Abstract

A large section of rural women in India do not have an independent source of income. Lack of independent income leads to a lack of control over household financial decisions, limits their participation in decision-making, and makes them entirely dependent on male family members for basic needs. Strict social norms, lack of education, and limited freedom to move outside the home keep women away from independent economic activity. This remains a huge social problem in our society today and keeps the male-dominated structure alive. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in India have been helping rural women build savings habits, access small credit, and move towards empowerment. But existing research suggests that savings and small credit are not enough to bring changes in women's socio-economic position. What is needed is a viable, sustainable livelihood that women can manage alongside their domestic responsibilities. Apiculture or scientific beekeeping is one such option. It requires limited land, low investment, and minimal labour. There is also a growing market for honey and other bee products. Several Indian states are promoting apiculture among rural women with support from SHGs and NGOs to provide a sustainable source of income. However, there is limited clarity on whether these initiatives are actually increasing women's control over their earnings, strengthening their voice at home, and improving their overall condition in society, or whether the income is simply taken over by the male members of the family. This gap needs to be understood. Otherwise, these apiculture initiatives may just become another income-boosting scheme without actually improving women's position in the family and society. This paper examined the experiences of rural women involved in apiculture in the Sewapuri Block of Varanasi district through a qualitative case study approach and found that apiculture provided women with a source of income and contributed to their participation in household decision-making. However, control over earnings varied from family to family.

Keywords: *Apiculture, Women Empowerment, Financial Independence, Sustainable Livelihoods*

Introduction

In rural India, women's financial dependence on male family members remains one of the deepest and most persistent forms of gender inequality. Millions of rural women carry a share of the daily workload but have no independent income, no

[1] Jagannath Mondal, Research Scholar, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar, Email Id - jagannath.mondal@aus.ac.in, Phone number -8250911544

[2] Dr. G. Albin Joseph, Associate Professor, Department of Social Work, Assam University, Silchar Email Id -albinjosephg@gmail.com, Phone Number - 9080838741

control over household money and no voice in financial decisions, often remaining entirely dependent on male family members for their basic needs. These economic struggles are driven by deeply rooted challenges such as lack of formal education and skill training, limited access to resources and employment opportunities, and strict patriarchal norms which limit what women are allowed to do and cause financial hardship (Singh et al., 2025). Social barrier often restricts their mobility outside the home and keep them isolated from the formal economy. This financial dependency causes more than just economic hardship; it takes away a woman's voice and freedom. Without any money on their own, they are excluded from important household decisions, treated badly, their choice did not given any importance or value, and they are left with no option but to tolerate the situations. This is a huge social problem that remains in our society today, and it keeps the male-dominated system alive.

True women's empowerment requires independent income (Anderson and Eswaran, 2009). When a woman earns her own income and gets to decide what to do with the money, she gains her self-worth, her position within the family shifts, and she gains a voice in household decisions. To help rural women achieve this independence, Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become an important initiative in community development. These groups are effective at bringing women together, encouraging a savings habit, promoting income-generating activities & entrepreneurship, challenging and changing social norms, and building a strong social support system for women. SHGs also play a critical role in developing various skills, enhancing self-confidence, reducing domestic violence and uplifting the overall status of women in society, fostering true women empowerment. But genuinely to break the cycle of financial dependence and achieve financial autonomy, these women need more than just microloans from SHGs or banks; they need a sustainable, income-generating activity. They need a business that is profitable but practical enough to manage it alongside their existing household responsibilities.

Apiculture or scientific beekeeping practices fill this gap perfectly. It is a unique entrepreneurial activity that requires very little space or land, a low initial investment, minimal manual labour, and takes less time (Ram, 2016). Women can easily manage bee hives and colonies.

Because of increasing market demand for bee products such as honey, wax, and bee venom, apiculture provides a steady, significant income source. It is an ideal livelihood option for small-scale farmers, low-income groups, marginalised communities, women and landless individuals because of its low investment and high profitability nature (Ahmad et al., 2007). Another important role of apiculture is that it enhances agricultural production through pollination, creating a dual benefit of direct income from bee products and increased crop yields.

Apiculture is not a new concept, but a new initiative of apiculture is emerging to promote entrepreneurship and community development, where various organisations (focusing on apiculture) collaborate with government bodies (NRLM, KVK) or

operates independently to promote beekeeping among rural women across several Indian states. This apiculture initiative is designed to provide rural women with a sustainable, eco-friendly business that guarantees a steady income and transforms them into microentrepreneurs.

In the Varanasi district of Uttar Pradeshan organisation named Buzzworthy Ventures Pvt Ltd.startedan apiculture initiative by specifically targets rural women associated with Self-Help Groups to ensure it operates as a strict business partnership. Women took a loan through their SHG and purchased the initial bee boxes, bee colonies, and safety equipment from the organisation. The organisation also provided the necessary knowledge and professional training on hive management & honey extraction, comprehensive backend support and maintained a direct, continuous connection with the women throughout the entire process. The most crucial element is the guaranteed buyback system. Organisation committed to buyback 100% of the extracted honey from the women at a pre-agreed Minimum Support Price (MSP). The payment for the honey deposited directly into the women's personal bank accounts. They used a portion of this profit to repay their SHG loan instalment, and the rest became their independent, debt-free income. Additionally, the presence of the bee boxes naturally increased local crop pollination, boosted the village's overall food production.

Although numerous researches have been conducted onwomen's empowerment, agricultural benefits of apiculture, and apiculture as an income generation activity, a key area remains unexplored. Current literature rarely looks at the direct role of beekeeping in creating independent income streams for women, fostering their long-term financial independence, and driving broader social empowerment. This study aims to investigate the impacts of this apiculture initiative on rural women across three core dimensions: economic self-reliance, intra-household power dynamics, and comprehensive women’s empowerment. It is critical to determine whether this new income actually gives women a voice in their families, or whether male family members simply take control of their new earnings.

Operational Definitions

1. Apiculture

Apiculture, or beekeeping, is defined as the scientific management and rearing of honeybee colonies for the production of honey, beeswax, and other bee products, while also enhancing agricultural productivity through pollination (Ram, 2016).

2. Women’s Empowerment

In this study, women's empowerment refers to the process of increasing the power of women so that they can make their own decisions, gain control over their own lives, and improve their status in society (Mandal, 2013).

3. Self-Help Group (SHG)

A Self-Help Group is a small, community-based collective, typically made up of 10 to 20 women, who come together to pool savings, lend to one another, and gradually build a relationship with formal banking institutions. (Sandhu, 2015).

4. Sustainable Livelihoods

This study uses Chambers and Conway's (1992) widely cited definition: "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living; a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation."

Review of Literature

Several research works have already been conducted on women empowerment, women's empowerment, role of SHGs, agricultural benefits of apiculture, and apiculture as an income generation activity. The review of literature has been done in the following sub-themes:

1. Women Empowerment and Role of SHGs

Mandal (2013) discussed the concept of empowerment, and the need of women empowerment in modern world. According to the study, empowerment is the process of enhancing the power of suppressed groups so they can make independent decision, gain control over their own lives, improve their status and quality of lives and creates an equal power structure in society. Empowerment can be successfully achieved by acquiring resources, education, opportunities, and active participation. By highlighting the global condition of women, specifically about their socio-economic and political status, discrimination, violence against them, suppressed by the wheel of patriarchy the study identifies the need for women empowerment.

Anderson and Eswaran (2009) examine the various factors contributing to women empowerment and female autonomy within households in a developing country in their study by using the household level data from Health and Socio-Economic Survey conducted in 1996 from Matlab sub-district of Bangladesh. This study highlighted the conditions of women in Bangladesh such as women were not allowed to engage with external or independent economic activities and strict cultural and religious norms that restricted their freedom. According to the study independent income is an important factor of empowering women. Another factor is financial autonomy, meaning whether the woman gets to decide what to do with the money. A woman's financial independence and external employment have a significant impact on her decision-making power within the household. Another factor is age. As a woman gets older, she gets more autonomy. But independent income and financial

autonomy remain the main and most important determinant of the women empowerment.

Singh et al. (2025) highlights the relationship between patriarchal norms and women's empowerment in rural India by taking a sample of 137 women from rural regions of India, conducted surveys and in-depth semi-structured interviews. Structural Equation Modelling was used to evaluate the relationship between patriarchal norms and women empowerment. The study shows that patriarchal norms have a direct and significant negative impacts on women's empowerment and it's became a major barrier in women's access to education, economic opportunities, and decision-making within the household. It identifies education and financial autonomy as the most significant feature of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is directly linked to their access to resources, education, and economic opportunities, which are often blocked by patriarchal norms. This study suggests the need for gender sensitive policies for women's access to education & economic resources, promote skill building opportunities and financial literacy.

Fitriani (2025) discussed the importance of financial independence in empowerment of women using a mixed method approach. The findings indicate proportional relationship between financial independence and women's autonomy in both financial & family decision making. The author also identifies some challenges such as lack of financial literacy, limited access to credit and employment opportunities, gender pay gap as some major obstacles to achieve financial independence. To overcome these obstacles, this study suggests the need of financial literacy programs, workshops and courses. Furthermore, it advocates for gender sensitive policy to bridge the wage gap and enhance the access of credit for women to support women entrepreneurs and improve the economic development and foster overall women's empowerment.

Sandhu (2015) critically analysed the role and impact of SHGs on Women's empowerment. The study was conducted in Jalandhar district of Punjab by using case study method among the members from SHGs. The findings showed that from the need of money women joined the SHGs and earning money successfully allowed them to take part in family decision making and they experienced a significant decline in domestic violence. The study identified SHGs as an important tool to improve the economic and social status of women. However, it also identified some challenges such as lack of awareness, lack of family support and overdependence on NGOs. The author suggests the need of promote awareness about programmes, policies and schemes among women to overcome these barriers.

2. Apiculturein poverty alleviation, as an Income generationactivity and a Sustainable Livelihood practice.

Singh et al. (2016) demonstrated the significant potential of apiculture in income and employment generation. The study highlights that beekeeping is becoming increasingly popular specially among unemployed youths and small and marginal farmers in rural Punjab and they are doing it in large scale. Youths are earning more than 4L+ rupees annually from migratory beekeeping which provides a substantial

economic boost to rural economy. The authors suggests that KVKs and state department of horticulture and other agencies should provide training, develop market facilities and create awareness to promote apiculture.

Abrol (2023) identifies apiculture as a highly profitable, landless activity especially suited for rural women to generate independent income. This study highlights that Indian beekeepers achieved the highest mean net income per household globally in 2018 approximately $2533 despite relying on traditional methods and forest honey collection. This study suggests that apiculture can become a major foreign exchange earner for the country if modern and advance technologies are appropriately introduced and strict quality standards are maintained. This sector has the potential to provide sustainable self-employment to over 10 million rural and tribal families.

Jaiswal and Shyamrao (2019) highlight the broader economic potential of apiculture in India. It is highly efficient activity because it does not require any additional land or big investment, does not compete with agriculture or animal husbandry for resources, and less time consuming. The authors suggest that apiculture has a huge potential to reduce poverty in India, it can produce over 1.2 million tons of honey annually and provide employment to over 6 million rural and tribal family.

Ram (2016) examined the role of apiculture in agricultural production and supporting rural livelihoods in Indiausing a comprehensive analysis of secondary data up to 2015. According to the study apiculture plays an important role in enhancing agricultural productivity through pollination and it became an alternative livelihood option for rural people. It requires low investment, less time, a small amount of land. A person can do it with other livelihoods. It generates direct income through the sale of honey, beeswax, royal jelly, bee pollen, and propolis. This study highlights that apiculture is also beneficial for women's entrepreneurship. In certain states, the apiculture sector has significant women's engagement, with over 40% participation from Self-Help Groups. This study also explains the challenges, like lack of awareness and technical knowledge, pests and diseases, insufficient support system, absence of Research and innovation in apiculture technologies and policy gaps as some major barriers of this field. This study also suggests development of National Policy, Investment in research & development, Pesticide Regulation and sufficient promotion & marketing for Strengthening the Apiculture Sector.

Singh et al. (2026) investigated the constraints and opportunities of beekeeping among rural communities. The study identified some economic constraints such as limited economic resources to start a new economic activity and poor access to formal credit. However, the study suggests that collaborating beekeeping initiatives with SHGs and FPOs (Farmer Producer Organizations) has the potential to overcome these barriers, promote economic growth and enhance rural livelihoods. The study recognizes women's empowerment as a primary outcome of beekeeping initiatives.

3. Beekeeping and Women Empowerment

Padhy, Satapathy and Nanda (2025) explain about what beekeeping is and connection between Beekeeping and Women Empowerment specially in tribal areas. This study highlights on the challenges like low literacy levels, insufficient educational facilities and healthcare services, high child and maternal mortality, and poor nutritional intake faced by tribal women. These challenges exist because of economic instability, limited access to financial resources and lack of economic opportunity. It also identifies the traditional gender norms and patriarchal conventions as a major barrier of women empowerment. This study suggests beekeeping as a practical tool to overcome these challenges and foster women's empowerment. Beekeeping not only helps in economic empowerment but also develop social empowerment, leadership and increase their decision-making capabilities. This study also provides a clear picture of beekeeping, benefits and income generation process through beekeeping. This study also emphasizes on the role of NGOs and local organizations in skill development, resource mobilization, technical support, community mobilization and policy advocacy for empowering tribal women.

Mburu et al. (2015) evaluated the impact of Commercial Insect Programme on women's participation and empowerment in Kitui County, Kenya, where the programme introduced modern beekeeping practices and developed the honey value chain. This study was conducted by taking a sample of 250 farmers and data were collected using a pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire. Previously women were not engaged in this field due to restrictive norms of a male-dominated society and a common fear of bee stings. The findings show that after the implementation of CIP which introduced modern beekeeping technology and the chances of more income generation, women's participation in this field significantly increased. Women are more engaged in decision making about acquisition of hives, harvesting, selling of honey, which indicates their empowerment. This study suggests that government should implement more projects like CIP which have the potential of breaking gender roles and promote gender equality and women's empowerment.

Belete and Ayele (2020) conducted a qualitative evaluation to determine the impact of a honey value chain project on women's empowerment in Ethiopia. The findings showed that apiculture initiative significantly enhance personal empowerment (such as self-esteem and decision-making power, individual capabilities, personal autonomy) and relational empowerment (such as contribution to household income, group participation and leadership participation) among rural women. This study also highlights the significant role of SHGs in this transformation. SHGs not only facilitate savings and credit access that help women to invest in economic activities and improve their livelihoods, but also provide a platform for their voice. This psychological and economic empowerment enabled women to challenge social norms and stereotypes and improve their status within the family and achieve leadership roles within their community.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out whether apiculture has helped rural women to earn their independent income.

2. To find out the influence of independent income on women's participation and voice in household financial decision-making.

3. To study the overall impact of the apiculture initiative on the social status and empowerment of rural women within their families and communities.

Research Methodology

This section includes the methodology of the study.This includes a detailed account of the research strategy, methodology, and process, along with the approach taken to data collection and analysis, the ethical considerations addressed, and the limitations encountered throughout the study.This study has been conducted using qualitative case study approachto examine the impact of apiculture initiative on the economic self-reliance, household decision-making power, and overall empowerment of rural women in the Sewapuri Block of Varanasi district.Purposive sampling has been used for selecting the sample. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted individually with each woman, covering areas such as her income from apiculture, control over her earnings, involvement in household financial decisions, and any changes in her position within the family and community.

Limitations of the study

1. The research area is specific, not broad, it is only limited in a block of Varanasi district.

2. The sample size is too small to generalize.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting interviews, informed consent was obtained from each participant after explaining the purpose of the study in simple language. Participants were told that their involvement was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point or skip any question without giving a reason. To protect their privacy, the identities of the women were kept confidential, and pseudonyms (Woman 1, Woman 2, and Woman 3) were used instead of their real names in the study. The information collected was used only for academic purposes, and care was taken to ensure that the women felt comfortable and were not pressured to share more than they wished during the interview.

Results

- **Socio-demographic Information of the Participants:**

Case No.	Age	Educational Qualification	Religion	Occupation
1	34	8th Pass	Hindu	Housewife
2	45	Illiterate	Hindu	Housewife
3	58	Illiterate	Hindu	Housewife

Detailed Description of the Case Studies

A. Case no-1.

Woman 1 is 34 year old rural woman living in Sewapuri Block, Varanasi district. She studied up to eighth standard. She got married at the age of 19. Now she lives in a joint family with her husband, three children and her in-laws. Her husband is a farmer. They belong to scheduled caste community and hold a BPL (Below Poverty Line) card. The family's income before the woman's involvement in apiculture was limited and irregular. They depended largely on seasonal agricultural output. The woman has been a member of a Self-Help Group for the past three years. She took a loan from SHG and joined the apiculture initiative about one and a half years ago. She currently has five bee hives. Honey is harvested from the bee hives every three months. She earns an average of 14000-15000 INR per quarter from the sale of honey, wax, and bee colonies. The organization buys honey and other products from her at Minimum Support Price (MSP). The payment is directly deposited into her bank account, from which she repays her SHG loan, and she keeps the remaining amount as personal savings or uses it for personal or household needs. She also shared that before she started earning through apiculture, all household financial decisions were made by her husband and father-in-law. But after she started earning, she was included into smaller financial matters. Earlier she had to ask her husband before buying anything and depend on him for money, now she can buy some necessary things for herself without asking or taking permission of her husband. She also said that other women in her village now see her as someone who is doing something great and a few women have approached her, asking how they can join this initiative. She furthershared that her father-in-law was initially against her working, believing that "women should not work outside". But he stopped objecting oncehe saw the financial benefits.

B. Case no-2.

Woman 2 is 45 year old rural woman living in Sewapuri Block, Varanasi district. She is illiterate and she got married at the age of 18. She lives in a joint family with her husband, four children and her in-laws. They belong to OBC (Other Backward Class) category. Her husband is a farmer and also worked as a daily wage labour during the

off season. She has been a member of a Self-Help Group for the past six years. She joined the apiculture initiative about two years ago. She currently has ten beehives and earns an average of 30000 INR per quarter from apiculture. She told that before joining the SHG, she barely knew how to count money. She was one of the first women in the Sewapuri block to join the apiculture initiative. That time an NGO, the Aga Khan Foundation provided subsidy for apiculture. But also, she had to take a small loan from SHG. She did not take a single rupee from her husband or household to start this work. The initial investment came entirely through the loan and the subsidy. She has fully repaid her SHG loan within nine months. She also works as a caretaker of all beehives, which are placed in a field just outside her house. She enjoys this work. The organization assigned her this role and provided a monthly payment for this work. Before she started earning, her husband controlled the decisions related to children's education and general daily household matters. She had to ask her husband for money for even small needs and her movement outside the house was limited. Joining the apiculture initiative was not easy for her. She faced strong opposition from her husband and other family members. In fact, her own son and daughter did not support her decision to join. However, after she began earning her own income, the family no longer objects her work. She fully controls her own income. She now travels to different places to train other women in beekeeping. She manages her own travel expenses and is currently contributing her income toward building a new house for the family. In her village other women are now appreciate her and feel encouraged by her example and show interest to join the initiative to achieve financial independence. Starting from strong family opposition to becoming a trainer and contributing to her family reflects a significant shift in her position within her family and community.

C. Case no-3.

Woman 3 is 58 year old rural woman living in Sewapuri Block, Varanasi district. She is illiterate and got married at the age of 20. She lives in a nuclear family with her husband. Her two sons live separately in different cities with their own wives and children. They are working as a daily wage labour. They belong to scheduled caste community and hold a BPL (Below Poverty Line) card. The woman has been a member of a Self-Help Group for the past ten years. She joined the apiculture initiative about one year ago. She currently has five beehives. She did not receive any subsidy so she took a full loan from her SHG to start the work. She is still repaying her loan. Her earnings from apiculture have been lower than expected. She earns an average of 10000 INR per quarter. Due to the losses of bee colonies caused by insect and heavy rainfall affected the bee hives. Her husband works as a daily labourand has alcohol addiction. He did not contribute to household responsibilities and took the money sent by their sons to spend on alcohol. In the past he had taken her personal savings and jewelleryto sell for the same.

Because her husband was careless about household and financial matters, she faced no objection from her family when she decided to join this apiculture initiative. She took a risk to solve the financial dependency. However, during the first three months after she started apiculture, her husband tried to take her income. She resisted and with the help of her SHG members and villagers she took this issue to the Pradhan's office for a solution. After that her husband's demands for money reduced and his alcohol addiction also decreased. At present, she independently manages her household's daily expenses by using the money from apiculture earnings and the money sent by her sons. She now has full control over the income and household decisions.

Discussions

Based on the three cases and the literature review, the researchers discovered some insightful knowledge about the overall condition, impact of the apiculture initiative on the social status of rural women engaged in apiculture practice and empowerment of rural women within their families and communities.

1. The quarterly income of the women from apiculture practices ranged between Rs. 10,000-30,000.
2. In some cases, income was less due to mismanagement, insect attack and heavy rain. But if managed properly it gives a good amount of profit throughout the whole year.
3. The organization bought all the honey and other bee products at Minimum Support Price (MSP) and the money directly deposited into the woman's bank account, giving her an initial control over the money.
4. Women who got engaged with this initiative early, got subsidy from an NGO named Aga Khan Foundation.
5. The findings of the study align with Anderson and Eswaran (2009), who talked about the connection between independent income and women's empowerment. All three women gained a source of income and changed their lives.
6. Control over earnings was not same across the three cases. It depends on individual household circumstances, shows that independent income does not automatically give control over that income.
7. Woman 1's case shows that independent income does not automatically lead to women empowerment. After earning money, larger financial decisions still remained in the hand of her husband and father-in-law, supporting Singh et al.'s (2025) finding that patriarchal norms are a major barrier of women's empowerment.

8. Woman 2's case shows the strongest shift in financial autonomy, as she fully controls her earnings and contributes to major household decisions like house construction. This supports Belete and Ayele's (2020) findings that apiculture can build both personal and relational empowerment.
9. Woman 3's case highlights a different empowerment, shaped by necessity due to husband's alcohol addiction and carelessness towards household responsibilities. She has the control over her income not because of she started earning, but she resisted her husband's attempt to take the money with the support of SHG and village members.
10. All three women gained confidence and a stronger voice in at least some household matters.
11. This study shows that literacy aloneis not the deciding factor in whether a woman gains financial autonomy. In this study we can see that woman 1 had some formal education and she was included into smaller financial decision, while the two other illiterate women gained full control over their earnings.
12. This study also supports Sandhu's (2015) findings that SHGs play an important role towards women's empowerment beyond just savings and credit.
13. All three women experienced a change in social status. Other women began viewing them as role models and approaching them to join the initiatives.
14. Woman 2's case shows a different kind of empowerment. Moving from being a beneficiary to becoming an active contributor to other women's economic independence.
15. Overall, these three cases shows that apiculture can be an effective sustainable livelihood practice for economic independence among rural women. But the real empowerment depends on household dynamics, family attitudes, literacy and support of external support systems such as SHGs and NGOs.

Conclusion

Women in India, especially rural women, mostly remain financially dependent on the male member of the family, with limited access to resources and education, and almost no decision-making power in the household. SHGs play an important role in providing them with a platform to express their needs and solve their problems. But the help is not enough, small loans and micro-credit are not sufficient, they need a sustainable, high-potential, income-generating activity to achieve independent income and financial autonomy.

This study examined the impact of the apiculture initiative run by Buzzworthy Ventures Pvt. Ltd. on the economic self-reliance, household decision-making power, and overall empowerment of rural women in the Sewapuri Block of Varanasi district.

The findings show that apiculture has helped all three women to earn an independent income. In terms of decision making, the influence of this income varied. Woman 1 gained a voice in smaller household decisions while woman 2 and woman 3 achieved full control over their own earnings and involvement in major household decisions. All three women experienced a positive shift towards their social status, gained recognition, confidence and respect within their families and communities. True empowerment cannot be achieved through charity and one-time assistance. By providing rural women a sustainable and reliable source of income, their dependence on male family members can be reduced, enhance their economic growth, financial autonomy, and foster the process of true empowerment. This study shows that apiculture can serve as a meaningful pathway toward rural women's financial independence and gradual empowerment.

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