Estd.: 1972
Reaccredited with 'A' Grade by NAAC (3rd Cycle 2016-2021)
MANIBEN NANAVATI WOMEN'S COLLEGE
website: mnwc.edu.in

ISSN 2229 - 385X



VOL-14 | DEC. 2024

RESEARCH HORIZONS

PEER REVIEWED JOURNAL

MANIBEN NANAVATI WOMEN'S COLLEGE
Smt. Kantaben Shah Research Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies Publication
BEST COLLEGE 2018–2019 Awarded by SNDT Women's University, Mumbai
Vallabhbhai Road, Vile Parle (W), Mumbai - 400 056.
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researchhorizon.mnwc.edu.in

Indexed with EBSCO, USA in 2013

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Place of Publication	:	Mumbai
Periodicity of its Publication	:	Annual
ISSN	:	2229-385X
Printer's Name	:	ACTIVE COMPUTER, Mumbai
Publisher's Name & Address	:	Maniben Nanavati Women's College Vallabhbhai Road, Vile Parle (West), Mumbai 400 056. Maharashtra, India.
Chief Editor's Name and Address	:	Dr. Rajshree P. Trivedi Principal Maniben Nanavati Women's College Vallabhbhai Road, Vile Parle (West), Mumbai 400 056.
Nationality	:	Indian
Registration No.	:	MAHMULOZI35/13/2005–TC dated 7th November 2005

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FOREWORD

Dear Scholars,

It is with great pleasure that we present the latest edition of Research Horizons, the esteemed international multidisciplinary and multilingual peer-reviewed journal of Maniben Nanavati Women's College. Since its inception in 2001 as Anveshan, our journal has been committed to fostering and disseminating scholarly research across diverse fields. Over the years, it has evolved into a platform that not only showcases academic rigor but also embraces a wide spectrum of perspectives and disciplines.

In this edition, we continue our tradition of featuring insightful research that addresses contemporary issues and contributes to the global body of knowledge. Our contributors have delved into topics ranging from economic analyses and social sciences to literary critiques and scientific studies, reflecting the journal's commitment to multidisciplinary scholarship.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the authors for their valuable contributions, the reviewers for their meticulous evaluations, and the editorial team for their unwavering dedication to maintaining the high standards of this publication. We also thank our readers for their continued support and engagement with the journal.

As we navigate the complexities of the modern world, it is through such scholarly endeavors that we can hope to understand, interpret, and influence the myriad facets of our societies. We invite you to engage with the research presented in this edition and encourage you to contribute your own insights to future issues.

Best regards,

Dr. Rajshree Trivedi,

Chief Editor,

Director, KSRC

Principal, MNWC

FROM SENIOR EDITOR'S DESK



Dear Friends,

It gives us a great pleasure to place before you Research Horizons, 2024-25 edition that covers a vast range of national and global contemporary concerns examined and analysed from several disciplinary lenses.

While Dr. Linda Lane's article on "Gender-Based Violence Interventions In Ecuador And South Africa" brings to the fore multifaceted inter-sectional of vulnerabilities and marginalities that result in violence and discrimination against women,children and poverty groups; "A Study On Climate Change and Gender Equality: Recognising the Connectivity and Looking for Solutions" by Dr. Vishal Arun Gupta delves on crucial concern of gendered existential reality on this planet due to climate triggered disasters.

Mr. Hardik Majithia provides a profile of "Customer Feedback Systems' Importance as a Successful Commerce Strategy In The Hospitality Sector". Coauthored article by Dr. Vinod H. Kamble, Ms. Karishma Bajrangi Gaud probes "Perceived Barriers and Motivations for Start-Ups among Undergraduate Women Students" so that solutions to this mind-boggling problem among young adults can be addressed. Dr. Atul Krishna Ghadge highlights multiple survival struggles due to socioeconomic challenges faced by migrant communities in Navi Mumbai. Linda Paul, Prof Dr Ravinder Rena discusses "Empowering Migrant Women Entrepreneurs: Strategies For Overcoming Marginalization And Fostering Economic Inclusion". Dr. Sangeeta Desai and Dr. Ashish Desai's research talks about "Enhancing Institutional Capabilities For Participative Monitoring &Evaluation (M&E): Learning From Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM)'. Dr. Dr. Vatsala Shoukla's field based study has resulted in an article titled, "Feminist Visions: Area Sabhas As Dynamic Agents In Urban Transformation Under Community Participation Laws".

In the field of literature, this issue has included Susan Asokan's reflection on "Home And The Homeland: Examination Of Select Poems By Alok V. Menon".

Gurupal Chadda provides a critical overview of the Buddhist Concept Of Nibb??a. Dr. Wisulanbou and K. Mangayarkarasi provides a nuanced understanding of the predicament of tribal women in the North Eastern State of Nagaland in their article on "Cultural and Environmental Challenges: Water Scarcity and Gendered Responsibilities among Liangmai Women".

Research Horizon team requests you to contribute your research articles for this highly acclaimed annual publication, an outcome of intellectual energy derived from great knowledge of nationally and internationally renowned academicians who are on our Editorial Advisory Committee. We extend our heartfelt thanks to all contributors and peer-reviewers for their dedicated services for successful publication of Research Horizon, 2023.

Prof. Vibhuti Patel,
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Chief Editor

Dr. Rajshree P. Trivedi is the Principal and Head, Department of English of Maniben Nanavati Women's College, Mumbai. Her research publications include more than ten books, nine chapters in edited books and many papers in international/national journals. She has been on the Editorial Advisory Board of a few international journals, indexed and enlisted with reputed databases. A research guide, referee and resource person at research forums, she has undertaken a couple of research projects in transdisciplinary studies.

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"Research is seeing what everybody else has seen and thinking what nobody else has thought"

- Albert Szent-Gyorgyi

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Prof. Sitanshu Yashaschandra, a Fulbright Scholar and a Ford West European Fellowship recipient, Yashaschandra has a Ph. D. in Comparative Literature from USA and another Ph. D. in Indian poetics from Mumbai. He worked as Vice Chancellor (Saurashtra University), UGC Emeritus Professor and National Lecturer, as well as Chief Editor of the Encyclopedia of Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi). He has taught, as Professor and Chair of Gujarati, at the M. S. University of Baroda, from 1972, and has been a visiting Professor at the Sorbonne University (Paris), University of Pennsylvania, the Loyola Marymount University (Los Angeles), and Jadavpur University (Kolkata). His creative and critical theory work is mainly in Gujarati but has been widely translated into English and Hindi and many other languages. He has translated several works of poetry, drama and criticism from English to Gujarati. Tokhaar, his adaptation of Peter Shaffer's Equus was hailed as a landmark play in modern Gujarati theatre. His poetry anthologies include Odysseusnu-n Halesu-n (1975), Jatayu (1986), Mohen-jo-dado (Audio-book in 1990) and Vakhaar (2008). A few of his plays are Kem Makanji kyan chalya (1999), A Manas Madrasi Laage Chhe(1999), Khagras (1999), Ashvatthama aje pan jive chhe ane hanay chhe (2001), Nakkamo Manas Chhe Narasimha Maheta (2008) and Akhaani Olakhaano (2009).

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Dr. Chandrika Raval is Professor in Sociology, School of Social Sciences, and Gujarat University Ahmedabad. She has been awarded with many prizes while pursuing her education. She has been recipient of Chitta shantiben Diwanji Award for Social Work by Gujarat Stree Kelavani Mandal. She has an extensive teaching experience of about 33 years in the field of sociology. Also published number of research papers in reputed International and National journals and has presented research papers at International and National forums. She has Guided around 10 students for Ph. D., 45 students for M. Phil. and 75 M A students. She has been an active social worker and conducting activities for the women and orphan children by being actively collaborating with various N G O's.

RESEARCH HORIZONS
ISSN 2229 385X

An International Peer Reviwed

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

INVITED ARTICLE

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE INTERVENTIONS IN ECUADOR AND SOUTH AFRICA

Linda Lane*

Abstract

Gender based violence is recognized as a major societal concern and a violation of human rights. Around the world at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime. At the same time there is a growing understanding that there is no universal strategy to combat violence or to mitigate its effect on the lives of victims and their communities. To be effective strategies should be integrated into the cultural, social, and economic conditions of the countries in which they are adopted. This article discusses how social work practice can benefit from indigenous philosophical ideas anchored in social and cultural context by examining two gender-based violence interventions. Evaluations of the interventions revealed improvement in the domains of general health, self-esteem, and social support for individual survivors in Ecuador and the importance of connecting gender justice with peoples' firsthand experiences as well as their deep-seated religious beliefs, for motivating transformative change in South Africa.

Keywords: **gender based violence, Buen Vivir, sumac kawsay, Ubuntu, integrative community therapy**

Introduction

The effects of violence on women can be devastating, impacting their physical health, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. Beyond immediate injuries, violence increases women's long-term risks for chronic pain, physical disabilities, substance abuse, and mental health conditions like depression. Despite the severity of these consequences, many victims of violence find little to no support when they seek help. To address this global issue, the United Nations established the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, providing a framework for nations to combat violence against women and girls. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO) has played a pivotal role in shaping international initiatives to promote safety and equality for women worldwide. Together, these efforts have laid the foundation for global conventions aimed at creating violence-free lives for women and girls.

Social work as a profession has made significant contributions to combating gender-based violence (GBV). With a focus on social justice, community service, and upholding human dignity, social work has evolved from its early roots in the slums of Chicago to a global profession addressing complex social issues. The internationalization of social work has facilitated the exchange of ideas and practices, enabling the profession to tackle problems that transcend borders. In today's interconnected world, social problems are no longer confined to national borders. Issues such as poverty, discrimination, and gender-based violence have global dimensions, necessitating collaborative solutions informed by diverse cultural contexts. The knowledge and expertise of social workers from non-Western and Western backgrounds are vital for crafting effective interventions.

This article aims to highlight the importance of integrating non-Western approaches into social work practice by examining how Ecuador and South Africa address GBV. These nations, with high levels of gender-based violence, share histories marked by colonialism, poverty, and patriarchal social structures. While they have adopted aspects of Western social work, they are also drawing on indigenous philosophies to create more sustainable and culturally relevant practices. By showcasing interventions from these countries, this article aims to inspire social work practitioners to engage in cross-cultural exchanges and adapt best practices to their own local contexts.

Buen Vivir: An Indigenous Philosophy of Living Well

Buen Vivir ("living well") is an indigenous philosophy that emerged in Latin America, rooted in the indigenous movements of the 1960s-1980s. It emphasizes the value of Indigenous knowledge, practices, and worldviews in shaping an alternative, harmonious, and sustainable society (da Luz Scherf, 2023). While interpretations of Buen Vivir vary and sometimes conflict, three central tenets provide a shared foundation. First, Buen Vivir emerges from Indigenous traditions and holistic visions of the cosmos, emphasizing harmony with nature and respect for cultural heritage. Second, it rejects the anthropocentric worldview of modernity, prioritizing environmental sustainability and collective well-being over individualism. Finally, Buen Vivir challenges linear models of economic growth, advocating for reciprocal and complementary relationships between humans and the natural world.

Ecuador has embraced the principles of Buen Vivir through the Quechua concept of sumac kawsay, meaning "harmonious and fulfilling life." This worldview sees natural and

social environments as inseparable and essential for well-being and intergenerational sustainability. A "life in fullness" can only be achieved when harmony exists between humans, nature, and the cosmos (Macas, 2010). In 2008, Ecuador incorporated the philosophy of sumac kawsay into its new Constitution. This transformative move declared Ecuador a plurinational and intercultural state, with sumac kawsay as a guiding principle for social and environmental governance. The Constitution explicitly references sumac kawsay in 99 of its 444 articles, underscoring its centrality to national policy and law (Tapia Tapia, 2016). Alongside the constitutional reforms, Ecuador developed a Buen Vivir National Plan to translate the principles of sumac kawsay into actionable strategies (Mahabir et al, 2022). This plan prioritized the elimination of inequalities, including those based on gender, and promoted a vision of society where all individuals could thrive equally.

Through these efforts, Ecuador demonstrated a commitment to integrating indigenous philosophies with concrete initiatives to address systemic issues, including gender-based violence. The Buen Vivir National Plan exemplifies how cultural values can inform holistic solutions to complex social challenges. By embedding the principles of Buen Vivir into its Constitution and policies, Ecuador provides a compelling model of how Indigenous knowledge can guide sustainable and equitable social development.

Ubuntu: A Philosophy of Interconnectedness and Shared Humanity

Ubuntu is a traditional African philosophy that emphasizes interconnectedness, community, compassion, and a sense of shared humanity. The word "ubuntu" is from southern African languages and it means "humanness." To have ubuntu is to be a person who is living a genuinely human way of life. The Ubuntu conception of the good life is meant to guide individuals in the choices they make. The statement "I am because we are," encourages people to identify with others and to conceive of themselves as a "we" and to understand themselves as part of the community.

The guiding principles of Ubuntu are first, solidarity, the commitment and willingness by community members to abandon the acts of individuality and 'self,' and act to promote the welfare of all members as well as himself. Second, communalism which assumes that no human being can live in isolation. Everyone is inherently dependent on others. The individual's well-being is intertwined with that of the community. Third, coexistence emphasizes the ability to live with others (co-exist) in harmony. - Where there is Ubuntu,

there is respect and peace, there is equality among members of the community. Fourth, in ubuntu compassion is central. Compassion fosters care, empathy, and concern for others. This principle strengthens social bonds and enhances solidarity. Finally, respect and dignity - respecting others and granting them dignity others and upholding their dignity leads to mutual trust and respect. These values are crucial in sustaining cooperation and solidarity within the community (Ngubane & Makua 2021).

Ubuntu emphasizes that people's identities continuously develop within the framework of their mutual relationships with others, and that by supporting and caring for others, one's own identity and quality of life are strengthened. Ubuntu focuses on everyone's inclusion within a community and their mutual responsibility to each other. It recognizes that knowledge and practice passed down from earlier generations remain applicable for present future generations, in Ubuntu everything is connected.

Ubuntu is not explicitly codified in law; however, its principles and values have influenced policy frameworks, for example, the South African Constitution (1996), highlights Ubuntu principles and values such as human dignity, equality, freedom, and justice. Ubuntu also played a significant role in the country's transition to democracy. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was based on principles of restorative justice and healing, which are rooted in Ubuntu (Sewpaul & Krietzer, 2021). Moreover, the relevance of Ubuntu in social work has been recognised in the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development 2020-2030, which represents a positive and tangible foundation for the development and incorporation of other indigenous concepts and approaches programs aimed at addressing poverty, inequality, and social injustices.

Gender-Based Violence in Ecuador: Challenges and the Role of Integrative Community Therapy

Ecuador has the highest rates of physical and sexual violence against women among Latin American countries (Bott et al., 2019). A national survey revealed that 56.9% of Ecuadorian women have experienced physical violence, while 32.7% have encountered sexual violence (ENVIGMU, 2019). These alarming figures can be attributed to a culture of machismo, deeply rooted in poverty, lack of education, unemployment, and religious beliefs. These factors perpetuate and maintain women's vulnerability. Despite progressive gender equality legislation, Ecuador's patriarchal culture remains entrenched at all societal levels,

including the family, economy, and politics. This makes meaningful change difficult to achieve, as all institutions are influenced by patriarchal norms (Boira et al., 2017).

Despite these challenges, addressing violence against women has become a priority in Ecuadorian public policy. Domestic violence has been a particular focus, with the family often serving as the primary site for prevention initiatives. However, many of these interventions have unintentionally reinforced deeply racialized and gendered processes, perpetuating hierarchies that frame the family as a space where identity is constructed around ideals of motherhood and European norms (Tapia Tapia, 2016).

Integrative community therapy (ICT)

Faced with a widespread problem of gender-based violence (GBV) and limited resources, Ecuador sought cost-effective, sustainable solutions. Integrative Community Therapy (ICT) emerged as a promising approach. ICT was adopted for its ability to address the needs of the community, alleviate feelings of shame and stigma, and provide a low-cost, sustainable intervention. Moreover, ICT is grounded in the spirit of Buen Vivir (living well), an indigenous philosophy that has been integrated into Ecuador's constitution.

Since 2008, when sumac kawsay-Ecuador's version of Buen Vivir-was included in the Constitution, and the Buen Vivir National Plan (2013-2017) was implemented, gender-based violence and related policies have received increased attention. The incorporation of sumac kawsay has supported more holistic, community-based prevention strategies. ICT was seen as a model that aligned with these efforts, meeting the criteria of cost-effectiveness, community involvement, and sustainability. In contrast to models that place knowledge and authority in the hands of experts, ICT recognizes that knowledge arises "from the base, in the base, for the base." This approach emphasizes the empowerment of communities, particularly marginalized and oppressed groups.

The aim of ICT is to foster autonomy on both individual and systemic level. This is achieved by understanding the problem within the community, valuing, and empowering marginalized groups, and addressing the suffering caused by cultural impositions such as colonialism. ICT also honours traditional and ancestral knowledge, aiming to reconnect people with their cultural heritage and faith in their own abilities. Participants meet in groups and follow a methodology in five stages:

1. Welcoming
2. Selecting a theme
3. Contextualizing the theme - linking it to suffering
4. Sharing experience
5. Completion

The process is structured, with each session having a defined beginning, middle, and end. A trained community therapy facilitator supports the group through these stages. ICT sessions aim to create a space conducive to active listening, open dialogue, and emotional expression. Participants share life stories, struggles, and firsthand experiences. Often held in public spaces such as schools, churches, and community centres participants share life stories, struggles, and firsthand experiences of GBV. Large meetings can involve hundreds of people but regardless of how many people are involved, the process lasts approximately one-and-a half hour.

ICT Intervention for Domestic Violence Survivors in Ecuador

In 2021, one of the first Integrative Community Therapy (ICT) interventions for survivors of domestic violence was conducted in Quito, Ecuador. This intervention, in partnership with local community organizations, involved 87 participants aged 19 to 39. Of these, 69% were single, divorced, or separated, and nearly 50% had completed some form of post-high school education. Over six weeks, participants attended five traditional ICT circle sessions and one modified ICT music workshop. The music session involved listening to an original song about gender roles, followed by a discussion on redefining those roles. At the start of the intervention, about 35% of participants reported experiencing two violent relationships, and 23% reported three or more violent relationships. Post-intervention evaluations revealed statistically significant improvements in participants' lives (Sabina et al, 2023).

The ICT intervention led to improvements in several areas, including general health, self-esteem, and social support. The most notable change was in participants' sense of self-worth, confidence, and ability to enjoy life. ICT helped participants establish boundaries and distance themselves from their aggressors while reducing feelings of guilt and shame.

Benefits of ICT is that it assumes that solutions are best found within the community. The approach values local knowledge and inexpensive. is accessible since it required no insurance, money diagnoses, or transportation. Importantly, ICT can be scaled up to reach large numbers of people in a direct, cost-effective way (Sabina et al., 2023).

Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: A Persistent Crisis

South Africa, like many other societies, grapples with high levels of gender-based violence (GBV), affecting women, girls, and members of the LGBTQ+ community. Available statistics reveal alarming rates of violence, with South Africa recently being dubbed the "rape capital of the world." The rate at which intimate partners kill women in South Africa is five times higher than the global average. This widespread violence is deeply rooted in the intersection of social categories such as race, class, and gender, alongside patriarchal structures that perpetuate male dominance, create unequal power dynamics between genders, and normalize the oppression and victimization of women (Malatjie & Mamokhere, 2024). According to the Crimes Against Women in South Africa Survey (2020), 29% of South African women reported experiencing physical violence, and 6% experienced sexual violence. The survey revealed that divorced or separated women were more likely to have suffered physical or sexual violence compared to other women. Additionally, lower levels of education and wealth were strongly correlated with higher rates of violence, indicating that poor, uneducated women are particularly vulnerable to GBV.

The decision to address gender-based violence (GBV) through community-based interventions reflects a deep understanding of the vital role that community plays in South African life. The community is seen as a source of strength, where individuals share common traditions and identities. In South Africa, the individual is viewed as existing only within the community, and separation from it can be experienced as "worse than death." This collective understanding of humanity underpins the principles of ubuntu, which emphasizes interconnectedness, shared humanity, and mutual care (van Breda, 2016).

Domestic Violence Pastoral Care Training and Capacity Strengthening Model

The Domestic Violence Pastoral Care Training and Capacity Strengthening Model is a faith-based intervention developed by the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI). Founded in 2008 by Elisabeth Petersen, SAFFI emerged after Petersen, while serving as the

director of a home for abused women, recognized the challenges faced by clergy in addressing domestic violence within the Anglican Church in Southern Africa. Petersen also discovered that no organizations were actively collaborating with religious leaders and faith communities to address the faith-based dimensions of GBV (Pedersen, 2017). This realization prompted the founding of SAFFI. The primary goal of SAFFI's training program is to educate religious leaders about GBV and encourage them to actively engage in community-based initiatives to combat violence. SAFFI aims to empower faith leaders to collaborate with GBV service providers and the justice system, working together to eradicate gender-based violence through collective action.

SAFFI's training programs target religious leaders, faith communities, and institutions, as well as government and GBV service providers who offer support to abused women, perpetrators, and their families. Participants included seven religious leaders and seven focus groups (each focus group composed of 4 to 12 members) from various townships in the Cape area. SAFFI Training in 5 Phases is conducted over 1 year.

Phase 1 1-Day Recruitment and Sensitizer Workshops

Phase 2 5-Day Domestic Violence Pastoral/Spiritual Care training

Phase 3 10-week resource series: Our Places of Worship: True Sanctuaries of Hope and Healing

Phase 4 Support services, continuous in-service training, mentoring, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of the support service.

Phase 5 Monthly or quarterly meetings with religious leaders and faith communities and establishing and supporting religious leader forums on gender-based violence (SAFFI 2017a)

An evaluation of the training program revealed that most religious leaders recognized their role as community servants, addressing a wide range of issues affecting their congregations. SAFFI was successful in tapping into their personal and religious motivations, encouraging them to take the issues of domestic violence and GBV seriously. The evaluation showed that religious leaders who participated in the 10-week training program viewed their faith as a source of support and healing. The training created spaces for dialogue, allowing

faith communities to see that their faith could address the real-life challenges people face. These leaders found that connecting gender justice with people's lived experiences and deeply held religious beliefs could serve as a powerful motivator to become agents of change (SAFFI 2017b).

Conclusions

This article began by questioning what social work practices in non-Western countries can offer Western social work. To explore social work grounded in non-Western philosophical ideas, the article examined two case studies: Integrative Community Therapy (ICT) in Ecuador, and the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) in South Africa. Each of these practices focuses on preventing gender-based violence (GBV) and supporting victims through non-individualistic, community-centred approaches.

In Ecuador, the indigenous philosophy of Buen Vivir-known as Sumac Kawsay in Ecuador-shaped the implementation of ICT. In South Africa, Ubuntu-perhaps the most well-known of these philosophies-guided the creation of a faith-based initiative that honoured the country's deep spirituality and communal values, resulting in a training program for religious leaders. These interventions are attuned to the unique social and economic contexts of each country, focusing on specific forms of GBV in societies where the legacy of colonialism perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces patriarchal structures.

Although these philosophical ideas developed within specific national and regional contexts, they have transcended borders. Buen Vivir has influenced various Latin American countries, Ubuntu has become a prominent concept in global social work discourse. Both has inspired the creation of institutions and practices that enable communities to express their voices and foster transformative change. For GBV this article argues that the concepts and practices discussed provide hope in the search for innovative interventions. Ubuntu, and Buen Vivir promote ideas of collective harmony and living well together. They offer valuable insights for how community-based social work that is sensitive to the specific environmental, cultural, and social conditions can contribute to the fight against GBV.

Acknowledgements

This text has benefited from discussions in the gender-based violence research group (KRV) at Gothenburg University.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

A STUDY ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDER EQUALITY: RECOGNISING THE CONNECTIVITY AND LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Gender inequality is a pre-existing issue that is exacerbated by change in climate, which put a disproportionately effect on women. It is a universal issue faced by women all over the world. Especially in the backward region of the world, it is worse because of their poor economic condition and lower standard of living. This research investigates the connection between gender equality and climate change, emphasising how changes in climate affect women's social standing, health, and economic opportunities. It is essential to integrate gender considerations into climate policies and decision-making processes, as demonstrated by a comprehensive review of research and case studies related to climate change initiatives. The findings underscore the significance of empowering women, implementing gender-sensitive climate adaptation strategies, and fostering inclusive decision-making practices.

Keywords: **Gender Inequality, Climate Change, Climate Policy, Gender-sensitive.**

Paper received October 14th 2024, Revised - 24th October 2024, Paper accepted December 6th 2024

Introduction

A serious worldwide concern with wide-ranging effects is climate change. Its impact on societies worldwide is multifaceted, affecting various aspects of human life. One such area that has gained significant attention is the intersection of climate change and gender equality. This study aims to explore the complex relationship between these two critical issues, examining how climate change disproportionately affects women and girls, and how Equality between genders can be a key factor in building resilience to climate change. Climate change and gender inequality are two of the most pressing global challenges of our time. While they may seem unrelated at first glance, a closer examination reveals a deep interconnectedness between the two. This paper aims to explore this relationship, examine the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls, and discuss potential solutions to address both issues simultaneously.

It is easy to presume that climate change impacts both women and men equally, given that its most apparent consequences manifest on a societal level. However, it is influenced by the financial, societal, and governmental dynamics of the society, leading to the conclusion that climate change presents a unique set of risks that disproportionately affect women. Here researcher examines whether the unequal burdens that women face due to climate change are mirrored in larger macro-social institutions, ultimately hindering progress toward gender equality. Even though earlier studies have looked at how climate change affects women and the gendered aspects of climate vulnerability and adaptation in particular contexts, there are still unanswered questions about how much environmental changes associated with climate change affect women's rights and gender equality. As all of us know that the women living in backward areas face more complex problems due to climate changes because of their vulnerable economics and social standard.

Review of Literature

Roy, J., Prakash, A., Some, S. (2022).

In this study researchers say that the impact of climate changes is being experienced globally across all sectors, prompting initiatives to mitigate the risks linked to this phenomenon and to enhance existing vulnerabilities. The efforts to combat climate change are closely connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5, which highlights the significance of gender equality. There is a rising recognition of the gender-specific and climate justice implications that arise from various adaptation strategies. This research investigates whether the reported initiatives aimed at adapting to climate change contribute to advancing gender equality (SDG 5).

Rainard M, Smith J. , Pachauri S., (2023).

A mixed-methods approach was used in this study to investigate the variables affecting gender equity and how it relates to environmental performance. The study's quantitative component focused on regression analyses at the national level that looked at the relationships between environmental sustainability indicators like the Environmental Performance Index (EPI) and gender equity metrics like the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII). The findings showed that the GGGI had a poorer association with the EPI than the GII, while including a larger range of factors about women's economic

and political prospects. This conclusion suggests that rather than being purely causative, the relationship between gender equality and initiatives to ameliorate climate change may be nuanced and context-dependent. Furthermore, examining income categories underscores the role of national wealth in influencing this relationship with reference to gender.

Andrijevic, M. , Crespo Cuaresma, J. , Lissner, T., (2020).

According to this study researchers say that, differences in vulnerability and exposure within and between societies produce differential risks to the impacts of climate change. Vulnerability, exposure, and biophysical antecedents result from multidimensional inequality and unevenly distributed socio-economic development. Inequalities can be seen in racial and ethnic profiles, gender, education, and income and wealth, which are still major topics of socioeconomic study. Socially marginalized populations are more susceptible to the effects of climate change and are frequently impacted by the interaction of these several characteristics.

Joshua Eastin, (2018).

This research indicates that women may be more susceptible than men to the adverse effects of climate change on the environment. The study examines whether larger macro-social institutions acknowledge the disproportionate burdens that women face due to climate change, which in turn hinders women's rights and gender equality. It posits that gender disparities in vulnerability to climate change not only mirror but also exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Women's pursuits of economic independence, human capital development, and overall health may be obstructed by inequalities in resource ownership and control within households, increased family responsibilities due to male out-migration, limited access to essential resources like food and water, and heightened susceptibility to disasters. As women encounter greater challenges in achieving financial autonomy, the implications for gender equality include a reduction in their bargaining power within households. It is expected that entrenched gender discrimination and socioeconomic inequalities will intensify in the public sphere, limiting women's access to formal job markets, civil society organizations, and collective political engagement. The convergence of these factors may hinder the progress of laws and practices that advocate for equal status, thereby undermining overall gender equality within society. An empirical analysis of this relationship is conducted using data from developing countries spanning from 1981 to 2010. The findings indicate that declines

in women's economic and social rights are associated with fluctuations in long-term average temperatures and an increase in climate-related disasters, suggesting that climatic shocks and disasters generally have a detrimental effect on gender equality. Countries with lower levels of democracy, a higher dependence on agriculture, and less economic development are more likely to experience these adverse effects.

The above review of literature confirms the strong interconnectedness of climate change and gender equality. Addressing both issues simultaneously is essential for building more resilient and equitable societies. We can successfully address the challenges raised by change in climate and build a more sustainable future for everybody if we enact gender-responsive climate policies and empower women.

Research Methodology

Primary and secondary data collecting may serve as the study's foundation. Primary data are data that the researcher directly collects as per their need through personal interviews, Google Forms, or any other convenient way from the respondents directly. However secondary data are those data that are readily available through print media, magazines, journals, digital media, etc. These data are collected by someone else and research uses it. In short primary data is first hand and fresh data however secondary data are second-hand data.

This study is based on secondary data from a range of sources, including research papers, articles, theses, and case studies.

Objectives

1. To analyse the direct influence of climate change on women's lives.
2. To analyse the indirect influence of climate change on women's lives.
3. To understand the role of women empowerment in building resilience to change in climate.
4. To understand the interconnectedness of change in climate and gender equality.

Scope of the study

This study covers the impact of climate change on women, including the direct and indirect impacts. It also covers the role of gender equality in building resilience through woman empowerment, Gender-Sensitive Climate Policies, educational awareness, etc. This study also covers findings and suggestions about this issue.

Understanding the Interconnectedness

- **Direct Impacts:** Natural catastrophes including floods, droughts, and storms are expected to occur more frequently and with greater intensity due to climate change. These events can disproportionately affect women, who often carry the burden of household responsibilities and agricultural labour, rendering them particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate-induced disruptions.
- **Indirect Impacts:** Change in climate has the possibility to intensify pre-existing gender disparities. For example, it may contribute to heightened food insecurity, thereby restricting access to education and healthcare for women and girls. Furthermore, migration driven by climate factors can elevate the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence.
- **Gender Norms and Roles:** Traditional gender roles and societal norms can obstruct women's capacity to respond effectively to climate change. For instance, women often face restrictions regarding land ownership and lack decision-making authority, which can hinder their ability to adopt practices that enhance climate resilience.

The Role of Gender Equality in Building Resilience

- **Empowering Women:** Building resilience to climate change requires empowering women via economic opportunities, education, and involvement in decision-making. When women have agency and a voice, they are more capable of mitigating and adapting to the consequences of climate change.
- **Gender-Sensitive Climate Policies:** Developing and implementing gender-sensitive climate policies can ensure that the needs and priorities of women are considered in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. This includes promoting gender equality in climate-related decision-making and investing in women-led climate initiatives.

- **Strengthening Women's Organizations:** Assisting women's organisations is essential in promoting equitable climate policies and equipping women with the necessary resources and support to effectively respond to climate change.
- **Education and awareness:** Encourage the development of educational initiatives and awareness campaigns that are sensitive to gender issues, focusing on climate change and its effects.
- **Access to resources:** Guarantee fair access to resources such as land, water, and financial services for women and girls.
- **Sustainable livelihoods:** Support the development of sustainable livelihoods that are resilient to change in climate, particularly for women.
- **Gender-based violence prevention:** Establish strategies to avert and address gender-based violence within the framework of climate change.
- **Community-based adaptation:** Foster community-based adaptation initiatives that involve women and girls in decision-making and implementation.
- **Strengthening legal frameworks:** Governments should enact and enforce laws that protect women and girls from gender-based violence, including those related to sexual assault, domestic violence, and trafficking.
- **Strengthening social services:** Providing access to quality healthcare, mental health support, and legal aid services can help survivors of gender-based violence recover and rebuild their lives.
- **Community-based initiatives:** Supporting community-based initiatives that promote gender equality and prevent violence can be effective in addressing the main causes of gender-based violence.
- **Emergency preparedness and response:** Developing gender-sensitive emergency preparedness and response plans can help to protect women and girls during and after climate-related disasters.

Case Studies on Climate Change and Gender Equality

Following are few case studies to understand the actual issues and also highlight the impact of change in climate on women.

Case Study 1: Bangladesh

- **Context:** Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change since it affects livelihoods, agriculture, and food security with increasing sea levels, harsh weather, and increased salt. It ultimately creates the impact on the people.
- **Impact on Women:** Due to their reliance on agriculture, limited access to essential resources, and lack of power over decision-making, women in Bangladesh are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. They encounter a variety of challenges, such as food insecurity, water scarcity, and increased workloads associated with adapting to the changing climate.
- **Response:** To address the gendered effects of change in climate, the government of Bangladesh has put in place several initiatives, such as training programs specifically targeted at women for climate adaptation, access to technology that is climate resilient, and women's involvement in climate decision-making. Furthermore, non-governmental organisations have been implementing programs like microfinance and community-based adaptation projects to strengthen women's resilience to climate change and to empower them.

Case Study 2: Kenya

- **Context:** Climate change is causing droughts, floods, and land degradation in Kenya, which has an impact on livelihoods, water resources, and agriculture. It make the poor standard of living of people in that region.
- **Impact on Women:** Kenyan women's reliance on agriculture, unable to access to property rights, and lack of decision-making authority make them especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Food instability, water scarcity, and increasing workloads associated with climate adaptation are some of the difficulties they encounter.

- **Response:** To address the gendered effects of climate change, the Kenyan government has put in place several initiatives, such as training programs specifically for women in climate adaptation, access to technology that is climate-resilient, and women's involvement in climate decision-making. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations have been implementing programs like microfinance and community-based adaptation projects to strengthen women's resilience to climate change and to empower them.

Case Study 3: Fiji

- **Context:** Climate change is causing Fiji to experience harsh weather, rising sea levels, and coastal erosion that affects livelihoods, tourism, and agriculture. It affects the social and economic conditions of the residents.

- **Impact on Women:** Due to their reliance on agriculture, inability to own land, and lack of decision-making power, Fijian women are mostly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Food instability, water scarcity, and increasing workloads associated with climate adaptation are some of the difficulties they encounter.

- **Response:** The Fijian government has implemented several measures to address the gendered impacts of climate change, including climate adaptation training programs tailored to women, access to environmentally resilient technology, and women's participation in climate decision-making. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations have been implementing programs like microfinance and community-based adaptation projects to strengthen women's resilience to climate change and to empower them.

These case studies highlight the need for gender-sensitive methods to climate adaptation and mitigation as well as how women and girls might be disproportionately impacted by climate change. We can create more egalitarian and resilient societies in the face of climate change by addressing gender inequality and empowering women.

Limitations of this study

The study on climate change and gender equality provides valuable insights into the interconnectedness of these two pressing global issues. However, it has limitations such as generalisation, data availability, the complexity of the relationship, focus on vulnerability and limited scope of solutions. To address these limitations, further research and analysis

are necessary, as well as a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between climate change and gender equality. This study is based on secondary data therefore it is subject to all inherent limitations of secondary data.

Findings of the study

- As per this study climate change has extreme impact on women and girls.
- Change in climate can exacerbate existing gender inequalities, such as gender-based violence, discrimination, and limited economic opportunities.
- Climate change can disrupt agricultural production, leading to food insecurity. Women and girls, who are often responsible for food procurement and preparation, are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of food shortages.
- Climate change may make diseases like dengue fever and malaria more common. The health effects of climate change are more likely to affect women and girls, who may have less access to healthcare.
- Climate change can lead to displacement and migration, which can increase the risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking.
- Education can be disrupted by climate-related disasters, especially for girls who might have to leave school to assist with family care or domestic tasks.
- Case studies from countries like Bangladesh, Kenya, and India demonstrate the interconnectedness of climate change and gender equality. Women are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts, but gender-responsive policies can help build resilience and promote gender equality.

Recommended Actions (Solutions)

- The involvement of women in climate initiatives will be enhanced by linking sector-specific, context-relevant situations to real-world perspectives. This approach will contribute to the adaptability and sustainability of these initiatives and helpful improve the standard of living of women worldwide.

- Women will propel sustainable development, provided that they are granted equal access to education and economic resources, including land, natural resources, training, and knowledge.
- Governmental and non-governmental organisations will be equipped to make informed decisions with the assistance of research focused on gender and development. To assess how women's involvement across the value chain affects climate results, it would be beneficial to design, implement, and disseminate pilot studies.
- To attain improved results, it is essential for the public and private sectors to collaborate, considering the numerous stakeholders engaged in climate-related decision-making. The participation of women should increase in making decisions.
- Addressing the digital and knowledge disparities faced by the most vulnerable communities necessitates the implementation of innovative strategies and financial solutions. Special financial assistance could be provided to women to improve their standard of living.
- Expanding development programs for women across the workforce value chain is both advantageous and essential. Women must possess the ability to make decisions and to have access to fundamental productive resources and do its proper utilisation.
- Incorporating a gender perspective into institutional reforms designed to enhance the execution of climate policies and adaptation strategies will result in both qualitative and quantitative advantages in lives of women.
- To enhance national and regional climate initiatives systematically and foster low-emission, sustainable growth, it is essential to ensure the active involvement of all pertinent ministries. The ministries or departments focused on social justice, as well as those dedicated to women's and child development, must work in close partnership to integrate the viewpoints of vulnerable populations into the planning processes of climate-related projects.
- Enhanced prosperity and inclusivity may be achieved by leveraging public funds for climate finance through collaborative efforts between the public and private sectors.

- Companies that engage women in both rural and urban areas of India can experience revitalisation through the implementation of a bottom-up strategy in social entrepreneurship and social investment.
- Providing women and girls with education, training, and access to resources to help them build resilience to climate change.
- Ensuring that women participate in climate change decision-making processes at local, national and international level.
- Building infrastructure that is resilient to climate change, such as early warning systems, flood protection, and sustainable agriculture practices.
- Ensuring gender-sensitive mitigation and adaptation plans for climate change as per the situation.

Conclusion

Climate change and gender inequality are two interconnected global challenges that require urgent attention. By recognising the linkages between these issues and implementing gender-responsive solutions, we can build more resilient and equitable societies for all. The relationship between gender equality and change in climate is deeply interconnected. To effectively tackle these links, it is essential to implement gender-sensitive climate policies, promote women's empowerment, and ensure inclusive decision-making processes. This research emphasizes the importance of integrating gender considerations into strategies aimed at both mitigating and adapting to climate change.

Recognising the relationship between climate change and gender equality enables us to formulate more effective and equitable strategies to address this global issue. Advancing gender equality is not merely a moral obligation; it is also a practical requirement for enhancing resilience against climate change. Empowering women and girls can foster a more just and sustainable future for everyone.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK SYSTEMS' IMPORTANCE AS A SUCCESSFUL CRM STRATEGY IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR.

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Abstract

Since the hospitality sector is becoming more and more competitive, one of the most important things in the modern period is keeping guests happy. Although hotel service prospects are seen as promising, it is important to research and understand how guest expectations are changing over time. In order to get input from guests, it is critical for the hotel sector to measure client satisfaction. Every guest has different expectations when it comes to the services provided by the hotel, so it's critical to understand their perceptions through both individual and aggregated information in order to close the gaps between consumer expectations and the services provided. The goal of this study is to better understand and enhance hotel customer relationship management (CRM) by the analysis of customer feedback, which is the guest's own account of their happiness or discontent with the good or service they have received. Depending on the guest's experience, the feedback may be favourable or unfavourable. You can use some of the recommendations as a guide to enhance your company tactics and enhance the visitor experience. The significance of customer feedback systems for putting CRM ideas into practice in the hospitality industry is the subject of this study. Convenience sampling was used to gather primary data for this study in the form of qualitative data from 20 managers of hotels in the Mumbai region through focus interviews using a standardized questionnaire.

Keywords: **CRM, CRM strategies, Hospitality Industry, Loyalty, Customer satisfaction, Customer Feedback System**

Paper received-4th Nov 2024 Paper revised - 11th Nov 2024 Paper accepted 22nd November 2024

Introduction

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is a vital strategy in the hotel industry, designed to enhance guest experiences and support long-term business growth. By integrating technology, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and best practices, CRM enables hotels to effectively manage guest interactions and preferences throughout their journey. From the initial booking to post-stay follow-ups, CRM systems gather and analyze data to provide tailored services that leave a lasting impression. This focus on personalization not only elevates guest satisfaction but also helps hotels maintain a competitive edge in a constantly evolving market.

One of the primary advantages of CRM in hospitality is its ability to create bespoke experiences for guests. By leveraging insights into preferences, past behaviors, and feedback, hotels can anticipate guest needs and deliver customized services. For example, remembering a guest's room or dining preferences and proactively addressing them during their stay can foster a sense of importance and care. Such thoughtful gestures are likely to encourage repeat visits and inspire guests to recommend the hotel to others, amplifying its reach through word-of-mouth referrals.

CRM also plays a crucial role in fostering guest loyalty and improving retention rates. Retaining existing customers is significantly more cost-effective than acquiring new ones, and CRM enables hotels to meet guest expectations consistently. Loyalty programs, often integrated with CRM systems, provide further incentives for repeat stays through rewards and exclusive benefits. Guests who feel valued are more likely to return, creating a steady flow of business and contributing to a hotel's profitability.

Additionally, CRM significantly enhances operational efficiency. Automation of key processes like check-ins, room assignments, and guest communication reduces errors and ensures a seamless experience. For example, when a repeat guest makes a reservation, the CRM system can automatically allocate their preferred room and alert the housekeeping team to prepare it according to their preferences. This synchronization across departments improves both staff productivity and the quality of service delivered to guests.

Revenue generation is another area where CRM proves invaluable. By identifying upselling and cross-selling opportunities based on guest data, hotels can promote relevant services. For instance, a guest who enjoyed a spa session during a previous visit might

receive personalized offers for a discounted package during their next stay. Targeted marketing efforts based on CRM insights are more likely to convert, resulting in increased revenue and a stronger bottom line.

Maintaining a positive reputation is critical in the hospitality industry, and CRM systems help hotels achieve this by actively managing guest feedback. By addressing concerns promptly and effectively, hotels can showcase their commitment to service excellence. Satisfied guests are more likely to leave positive reviews online, which influences prospective customers when choosing accommodations. Conversely, CRM tools enable hotels to mitigate negative feedback by resolving issues before they escalate, protecting their reputation.

Beyond improving the guest experience, CRM also provides hotels with valuable data insights that guide strategic decision-making. Analysing trends in guest preferences, booking behaviours, and service performance allows hotels to refine their offerings and optimize operations. For instance, data may reveal peak booking periods or popular service requests, enabling hotels to adjust pricing strategies or allocate resources effectively.

Despite its many benefits, implementing CRM in hotels does come with challenges. These include high initial costs, concerns over data privacy, and the complexity of integrating CRM with existing systems like property management systems (PMS). Resistance from staff toward adopting new technology can also hinder the process. Overcoming these barriers requires thoughtful planning, robust training, and a clear focus on the long-term advantages of CRM.

Many leading hotels have successfully utilized CRM to strengthen their brand and enhance guest experiences. For example, Marriott International's Bonvoy loyalty program uses guest data to personalize rewards and simplify bookings, fostering strong relationships. Hilton Hotels' CRM system offers conveniences like mobile check-ins and digital keys, improving overall guest satisfaction. The Ritz-Carlton empowers staff to address guest issues proactively, ensuring every interaction aligns with the brand's commitment to service excellence.

Looking ahead, the future of CRM in the hotel industry is promising, with advancements in technology offering even greater potential. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are expected to improve personalization further by accurately predicting guest preferences. Voice-enabled systems and chat interfaces will streamline

communication, while CRM integration with sustainability metrics will allow hotels to align with the growing demand for eco-friendly practices.

Review of Literature

Winer (2001), feedback plays a vital role in shaping CRM systems by delivering actionable insights that help refine customer interactions. By evaluating feedback, businesses can pinpoint areas of success and identify opportunities for improvement in their service delivery. This process ensures that services remain aligned with customer expectations while supporting the creation of tailored and meaningful experiences. Feedback also enables organizations to stay flexible and focused on their customers, encouraging innovation in service design. Additionally, it serves as a basis for predictive strategies, helping businesses anticipate customer needs and resolve potential issues in advance, ultimately enhancing the overall value provided to guests.

Ladhari (2009) highlights the critical role of gathering, evaluating, and implementing feedback to uphold exceptional service standards in the hospitality industry. By leveraging guest input, businesses can bridge the gap between customer expectations and their actual experiences, allowing for focused enhancements. For instance, hotels may refine housekeeping practices, upgrade facilities, or improve staff interactions based on guest suggestions, while restaurants might adjust menu options or enhance service efficiency. Proactively addressing feedback not only boosts customer satisfaction but also fosters loyalty, encourages repeat visits, and promotes positive recommendations, strengthening the brand's credibility and long-term success.

Mauri and Minazzi (2013) highlight the importance of online customer feedback, particularly from platforms like TripAdvisor, as a crucial tool for businesses in the hospitality industry to remain competitive. These reviews offer immediate insights into guest experiences, helping hotels and restaurants evaluate their service quality and pinpoint areas for improvement. By actively monitoring and responding to feedback, businesses can stay relevant, adapt to evolving guest expectations, and boost their online reputation. Positive reviews can draw in new customers, while addressing negative ones shows a dedication to enhancing service and customer satisfaction.

Kim, Vogt, and Knutson (2015) studied the connection between customer feedback and retention in the hotel industry, finding that establishing effective feedback systems plays

a key role in enhancing loyalty. When customers are provided with a platform to express concerns or share experiences, hotels can address issues swiftly and improve service delivery. This quick response not only resolves potential problems but also shows guests that their opinions are valued, which increases customer loyalty and encourages repeat visits, contributing to sustained business growth.

Smith and Bolton (2002) emphasize the necessity for hospitality businesses to implement effective feedback systems that accurately capture a wide range of customer experiences while minimizing biases. They recommend ensuring the anonymity of respondents to foster candid and honest responses. Additionally, offering incentives like discounts or loyalty rewards can encourage more guests to provide feedback, leading to higher response rates. By gathering more diverse and unbiased insights, businesses can better understand customer satisfaction and make well-informed improvements to their services.

Research Objectives:

1. To research and comprehend the significance of the hospitality industry's feedback system.
2. To determine the effect of a good feedback system on visitor retention and customer satisfaction.

Research Methodology:

For this research, primary data was gathered through detailed focus interviews with 20 hotel managers from the Mumbai region. The insights obtained from these discussions were then analyzed to draw relevant conclusions. Along with primary data, secondary data was collected from multiple reliable sources, such as research papers, academic journals, books, and industry magazines, to enrich the study and offer a wider perspective for the analysis.

Data Analysis:

Customer Feedback

Customer feedback is a vital source of information that reflects an individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a product or service. This feedback can take the form of positive or negative experiences, offering a comprehensive view of the customer's overall

interaction with a brand. By analyzing feedback and implementing suggestions, businesses can refine their processes and improve the customer experience. Without such input, organizations risk operating without a clear understanding of whether their customers feel they are receiving adequate value for their money.

In the hospitality industry, customer feedback plays an especially critical role. The sector thrives on delivering exceptional service across every touchpoint of the guest experience. Ensuring customer satisfaction requires continuous attention to detail and a willingness to adapt based on guest preferences. Feedback serves as a roadmap for understanding where improvements are needed, enabling hotels to meet and exceed expectations.

The importance of customer feedback is amplified by the growing purchasing power of consumers. As more individuals travel and explore destinations, the hospitality sector is expanding rapidly. This growth has led to increased competition among businesses striving to stand out in a crowded market. Satisfied customers often share their positive experiences, which enhances a brand's reputation and attracts new clientele. Conversely, addressing negative feedback promptly and effectively demonstrates a commitment to service excellence and fosters trust.

Obtaining and utilizing customer feedback is essential for differentiating a business in this competitive landscape. It enables hotels to maintain high service standards, adapt to evolving consumer expectations, and build long-lasting relationships with their guests. Ultimately, customer feedback is not just a tool for improvement; it is a cornerstone for success in the dynamic and customer-centric hospitality industry. By prioritizing feedback, businesses can create memorable experiences, drive customer loyalty, and sustain growth in an ever-evolving market.

Why Is Customer Feedback an Important Part of CRM?

- Customer feedback is a vital tool for understanding and addressing the needs and expectations of guests, particularly when introducing new products or services. A well-designed feedback system enables hotels to gain valuable insights into their clients' preferences and priorities, fostering repeat business and loyalty. By identifying what matters most to their customers, hotels can tailor their offerings more effectively, ensuring they meet or exceed expectations. The insights gained from customer feedback

allow hotels to refine their services, enhance the guest experience, and stay competitive in a dynamic market. Whether it is through improved amenities, personalized services, or targeted promotions, understanding guest preferences ensures that products and services align closely with consumer demands. Without such feedback, organizations risk operating in the dark, unable to determine whether their offerings truly resonate with their customers. This disconnect can hinder their ability to retain loyal patrons and attract new ones, ultimately affecting their long-term success. Feedback, therefore, is not just important-it is indispensable for delivering value and maintaining a strong competitive edge.

- Customer retention focuses on nurturing relationships with existing customers, who represent a significant investment for hotels. Retaining these customers is not only cost-effective but also essential for long-term profitability. Studies indicate that acquiring a new customer can be five times-and in some industries, up to 30 times-more expensive than retaining an existing one. Therefore, prioritizing retention strategies can yield substantial financial benefits. A critical factor in enhancing customer retention is ensuring consistent satisfaction with the products and services offered. This is where a robust customer feedback system proves invaluable. By collecting and analyzing feedback, hotels can identify areas for improvement and make targeted adjustments to enhance service quality. Meeting or exceeding guest expectations fosters loyalty and increases the likelihood of repeat business. improving customer retention directly translates to higher profitability. Satisfied customers are not only more likely to return but may also recommend the hotel to others, amplifying its reputation and reach. A feedback system serves as a cornerstone for achieving these outcomes, making it an indispensable tool for any customer-focused business.

- A customer's revenue potential goes far beyond their initial purchase at a hotel. Through effective strategies like cross-selling and upselling, hotels can maximize the value of each guest interaction. These strategies involve offering additional services or upgrades tailored to the guest's preferences and history, creating opportunities for increased revenue. Customer feedback plays a pivotal role in implementing these strategies successfully. By analyzing feedback, hotels can gain insights into what guests value most and identify areas where additional services may enhance their experience. For example, a guest who frequently dines in the hotel restaurant might appreciate

personalized dining packages, while another who often uses the spa may respond well to exclusive discounts or premium treatments. This targeted approach not only boosts revenue but also elevates the overall guest experience by making it more personalized and relevant. By addressing individual needs and preferences, hotels can foster stronger relationships with their customers, encouraging loyalty and repeat business. In this way, customer feedback becomes a critical driver of both enhanced service delivery and financial growth.

Ways of Receiving a Quality Customer Feedback?

- Hotels can encourage guests to participate in online surveys to gather both general and specific feedback about their stay and the quality of services provided. These surveys offer valuable insights into guest satisfaction and highlight areas for improvement. By capturing direct feedback, hotels can better understand their customers' experiences, identify trends, and address any issues promptly. Leveraging Artificial Intelligence (AI) and advanced technology has further enhanced the ability to analyze this feedback. Many hotels are now using AI to gain deeper insights into guest preferences and behavior patterns. This technology allows for more personalized service offerings by identifying popular trends, emerging customer demands, and areas where services can be improved or developed. By staying informed through this data, hotels can make informed decisions, adapt to evolving customer needs, and continuously improve the guest experience. Additionally, it enables them to stay competitive in the market, ensuring they meet and exceed guest expectations. Overall, combining guest feedback with AI-driven insights helps hotels maintain high service standards and drive customer satisfaction.

- Customer satisfaction surveys are essential tools for understanding how customers perceive an organization. These surveys come in various formats, allowing businesses to assess satisfaction across different customer segments. By capturing feedback from a diverse range of guests, organizations can identify specific satisfaction levels and track trends over time, gaining a clearer picture of overall customer sentiment. These surveys provide valuable insights into customer experiences, highlighting areas where service can be improved or tailored to meet evolving needs. By analyzing this data, businesses can pinpoint key issues affecting satisfaction and take targeted actions to

address them. Whether it's refining a particular service, enhancing product offerings, or improving customer interaction, these insights play a crucial role in making informed decisions. customer satisfaction surveys are instrumental in enhancing the overall customer experience. They help businesses not only measure how well they are meeting customer expectations but also continuously improve their services, fostering stronger relationships with their clients and ensuring long-term loyalty.

- Prioritizing customer needs and consistently striving to meet them is crucial for retaining loyal customers. Even if a hotel offers high-quality products and services, it cannot deliver exceptional customer service without genuinely understanding the perspectives and preferences of its guests. Simply providing excellent amenities is not enough if the hotel fails to connect with its customers on a deeper level. Efforts to understand what customers think and feel are essential for offering personalized, thoughtful service that resonates with their expectations. By actively listening to guest feedback, hotels can identify areas for improvement, adapt their offerings, and ensure that each guest's experience is tailored to their unique needs. This understanding creates an emotional connection with customers, fostering trust and loyalty. maintaining customer loyalty is about more than just delivering a great product-it's about delivering a customer experience that is both personalized and attentive. By focusing on understanding and meeting customer needs, hotels can enhance service quality, encourage repeat visits, and build lasting relationships with their guests.

Findings:

Data was gathered through interviews with approximately 20 hotel managers in the Mumbai region, using a structured questionnaire. The key findings from these interviews are as follows:

- Implementing a customer feedback system enhances business revenue.
- A customer feedback system boosts sales.
- A customer feedback system supports upselling and cross-selling opportunities.
- A customer feedback system strengthens the brand image.
- A customer feedback system improves services and helps retain loyal customers.

- A customer feedback system fosters customer intimacy.
- A customer feedback system aids in making decisions related to product development.
- A customer feedback system contributes to building brand intimacy.

Conclusion & Suggestions:

Customer service is a fundamental aspect of the hospitality industry, essentially synonymous with it. Focusing on exceptional customer service is crucial for thorough planning, attracting more customers, and enhancing overall satisfaction. The hospitality sector covers various areas, including accommodation, food and beverages, travel, and tourism, making it difficult to manage each sector manually. To tackle this challenge, many companies in the expanding industry are investing in Customer Feedback software. This technology enables effective management of customer service aspects and helps deliver a satisfying experience to hotel guests.

The advantages of implementing CRM systems in the hospitality industry are significant, particularly in improving customer service. Recent studies show that about 81% of customers would be willing to provide feedback if they knew they would receive a swift response.

Sending thank-you notes to clients who provide valuable feedback increases the likelihood of receiving genuine responses in the future. Additionally, personalizing email responses to sincerely thank customers for their time is an effective way to encourage honest feedback.

Guests are more likely to share their opinions when they feel their feedback is being acknowledged and acted upon. Hospitality organizations should prioritize following up with customers who give feedback. Neglecting this responsibility can lead to a decrease in feedback and pose a risk to the business by missing out on critical insights.

When a guest provides the same feedback multiple times, it indicates that the issue was not addressed after the initial comment. This can damage the organization's credibility and discourage guests from offering honest feedback in the future, potentially harming the business.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

PERCEIVED BARRIERS AND MOTIVATIONS FOR START-UPS AMONG UNDERGRADUATE FEMALE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Women face unique challenges and opportunities in startups, with support systems and motivations varying widely. The study is undertaken with the objective of knowing the barriers and motivations for start-ups among undergraduate female students. The survey reveals that many students are interested in startups, especially in food and beverage and fashion. Their motivational factors for entering into start-up are personal growth and financial independence. Common barriers include financial constraints and lack of self-confidence. Family, friends, and college programs are seen as key support systems.

Keywords: **Start-ups, Undergraduate students, Female students, Barriers for start-ups, Motivation for start-ups**

Paper received on October 29th 2024 Paper accepted on 6th December 2024

Introduction

Startups are young, innovative companies founded to develop unique products or services, often with the potential for high growth and scalability. They typically operate in uncertain and rapidly evolving markets, focusing on innovation, technology, and new business models to solve problems or meet emerging needs. Startups are characterized by their risk-taking approach, agility, and the pursuit of disruptive ideas that can transform industries.

increasing number of women who are founding and leading startups across various sectors, from technology and e-commerce to healthcare and social enterprises. Women-led startups bring unique perspectives, foster diversity, and often focus on creating inclusive and sustainable solutions. Despite these contributions, women entrepreneurs frequently face challenges such as limited access to funding, gender bias, and a lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, which can hinder their ability to scale their businesses.

To support women in the startup ecosystem, many governments, organizations, and investors are creating targeted programs and initiatives, such as women-focused incubators, accelerators, grants, and venture capital funds. These initiatives aim to provide women entrepreneurs with the resources, mentorship, and networking needed to overcome barriers and succeed in their ventures. Encouraging more women to participate in the startup space not only promotes gender equality but also drives innovation, economic growth, and diversity in the business landscape.

Review of Literature

A study titled "Understanding Motivations for Entrepreneurship: A Review of recent research evidence" aims to understand motivations for starting a business in the UK. Research finds that motivations like wanting freedom and better work, seeking personal challenges and recognition, aiming for financial security, and continuing a family business are better indicators of business success than just needing a job. These factors have a bigger impact on a business's growth and survival. (Drews, Stephan, Hart, & Mickiewic, 2015)

A paper titled "The influence of start-up motivation on entrepreneurial performance" aims to explores how entrepreneurial motives impact business development, focusing on outcomes such as survival, income, job creation, and growth activities over 40 months. Using self-determination theory, it aggregates start-up motives into a motivational index and finds that higher scores on this index are linked to better business performance, particularly in innovation and expansion. It also differentiates between three motivational categories-opportunity, career ambition, and necessity-showing that opportunity-driven entrepreneurs excel in innovation and expansion, while those motivated by career ambition show better survival, income, and hiring outcomes. (Caliendo, Kritikos, & Stier, 2023)

A paper titled "Entrepreneurial motivation among final year graduation students in Surat region" aims to explores the motivational factors influencing final-year students' inclination towards entrepreneurship by examining their socio-demographic characteristics. Factor analysis identified seven key factors affecting students' entrepreneurial motivation: greater business achievement, goal setting, problem-solving, economic consideration, social approval and support, independence, and risk-taking. The results indicate that students possess motivational traits to pursue entrepreneurship. (Halvadia, 2017)

The newspaper articles titled "Entrepreneurship in the Classroom" states that the pandemic has increased the use of digital apps, smart products, and platforms. Alongside big tech companies, India's growing start-up ecosystem is driving innovation. In 2021, India added 42 unicorns (start-ups valued at over $1 billion), averaging more than three new unicorns each month. With a strong interest in technology and a young population, India is well-positioned for innovation, but this entrepreneurial push needs to start at the grassroots level to reach its full potential. (Krishnan, 2022)

A paper titled "Women Entrepreneurs: A systematic review on problems, challenges and success" reveals that women entrepreneurs face significant challenges when starting new ventures, despite government efforts to promote women entrepreneurship in India. Key barriers include a lack of awareness, skills, and family support. While much research focuses on the problems faced by women entrepreneurs, there is a need to explore why families discourage them. The study also identifies factors that contribute to the success of women entrepreneurs, such as education, occupational experience, managerial skills, family support, strong social networks, and internal motivation. (Amrutha S., V. Santhi, & P. Nalini, 2022)

Objectives of the Study

1) To determine the willingness of female students to enter into start-ups after graduation.

2) To identify the factors motivating female students to establish start-ups.

3) To identify the possible barriers that female students may face when setting up start-ups.

4) To assess the role of colleges in supporting female students to set-up a start-up.

Hypothesis Statements

$\mathbf{H_0}$ = There is no significant relationship between having a family member in business and motivating factor for starting a start-up

$\mathbf{H_0}$ = There is no difference in the barriers to starting a startup based on the class or year of study.

Research Methodology

Particulars	Information
Research Type	A descriptive research design is used, where the focus is on finding out attitude of female students towards start-ups after completing their graduation.
Study Area	The search focuses on the suburban regions of Mumbai i.e. Borivali to Andheri area.
Sampling Method	A convenience sampling method is used, which involves selecting participants based on their easy availability and proximity.
Target population and Sample size	The research targets female students studying graduation, with a sample size of 88 respondents.
Data type and Sources	Primary data is collected through structured questionnaire. Secondary data is sourced from journal articles, newspapers and research papers.
Statistical Tools	Tables and graphs are used to organize the data for decision - making. The Mann - Whitney U test and Kruskal Wallis test is used for hypothesis testing.

Limitations of the Study

1) The sample size of 88 is a limitation, and the results might vary with a larger sample.

2) The study is restricted to the suburban areas of Mumbai, specifically from Borivali to Andheri, and does not include other regions.

7. RESULT / DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Table 7.1 Studying in

Particulars	Count
First Year	25
Second Year	44
Third Year	19
Grand Total	**88**

Source: Primary Data

Out of the 88 participants, 5 are studying in the First year, 44 in the Second year, and 19 in the Third year.

Table 7.2 Has your college organized any workshops or seminars related to start-ups?

Particulars	Count
Yes, regularly	27
Yes, occasionally	34
No, but there are plans to do so	7
I'm not sure	20

Source: Primary Data

When asked if their college had organized any workshops or seminars related to startups, 20 students said I am not sure, 7 Student said no but there are plans to do, 34 students said yes occasionally and 27 students said yes regularly college organize it.

Table 7.3 What types of entrepreneurship support does your college provide specifically for female students?

Particulars	Count
Entrepreneurship clubs	4
Female-focused funding	12
Mentorship programs	23
Networking events	7
Workshops and training	9
None	9
Not Aware	24

Source: Primary Data

When asked about the type of startup support their college provides specifically for females, 4 students mentioned entrepreneurship clubs, and 12 noted female-focused funding. 23 students highlighted mentorship programs, while 7 pointed to networking events. Additionally, 9 students mentioned workshops and training as available support options. 9 students said there was no specific support, and 24 were not aware of any initiatives.

Table 7.4 Are you willing to enter into a start-up after completing your graduation?

Particulars	Count
Yes	50
No	12
Not Sure	26

Source: Primary Data

When asked if they were willing to enter into a business after completing their graduation, 50 students said yes, 12 students said no, and 26 students were not sure.

THOSE WHO ARE NOT WILLING TO ENTER INTO START-UP AFTER COMPLETING GRADUATION

Table 7.5 In your family, is anyone involved in business?

Particulars	Count
Yes	29
No	47

Source: Primary Data

When asked if anyone in their family is involved in business, 29 students said yes, while 47 students said no.

Table 7.6 What kind of start-up would you like to do after your graduation?

Particulars	Count
Agriculture/Farming	1
Creative Arts and Design	4
E-commerce/Retail (Online or physical store selling products directly to consumers)	8
Education and Training (Offering tutoring services, online courses, or skill development workshops)	8
Event Planning/Management	6
Fashion and Apparel (Designing and selling clothing, accessories, or fashion consulting)	13
Food and Beverage	16
Health and Wellness (Starting a fitness center, yoga studio, or health-related product line)	2
Manufacturing/Production	2
Real Estate/Property Management	3
Social Enterprise	6
Technology/Software Development	7

Source: Primary Data

When asked about the type of start-up they would like to start after graduation, 1 student chose agriculture/farming, 4 chose creative arts and design, 8 preferred e-commerce retail, and another 8 selected education and training. 6 students were interested in event planning/management, 13 in fashion designing, and 16 in food and beverage. 2 students wanted to start a fitness center or yoga studio, 2 opted for manufacturing and production, 3 chose real estate, and 7 were interested in technology or software development.

Table 7.7 How motivating are the following factors for entering into a start-up?

Particulars	Major Motivation	Significant Motivation	Moderate Motivation	Slight Motivation	Not a Motivation
Financial independence	45	17	5	6	3
Passion for innovation	38	20	11	5	2
Desire for flexibility and work-life balance	30	13	21	8	4
Making a social impact	35	19	13	4	5
Pursuing personal challenges and growth	50	12	6	6	2

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that pursuing personal challenges and growth and financial independence are major motivations for the girl students for starting a start-up. Further significant number of participants said passion for innovation, desire for flexibility and work-life balance and making a social impact are also motivating factors for them for starting a start-up.

Table 7.8 How much do these factors create barriers for you to enter into a start-up?

Particulars	Major Barrier	Significant Barrier	Moderate Barrier	Slight Barrier	Not a Barrier
Lack of financial resources	48	14	7	5	2
Fear of failure	23	25	14	9	5
Lack of entrepreneurial knowledge/skills	31	18	13	10	4
Lack of access to networks and mentors	21	24	13	13	5
Regulatory and legal challenges	25	21	11	10	9
Social and family expectations or pressure	26	19	10	12	9
Lack of confidence and self-belief	31	14	9	11	11

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that lack of financial resources followed by lack of entrepreneurial knowledge / skills and lack of confidence and self-belief are major barriers for the girl students for starting a start-up. Significant number of respondents said that fear of failure, lack of access to networks and mentors, regulatory and legal challenges and social and family expectations are also barriers for them to enter into a start-up.

Table 7.9 Which of the following support systems do you find most helpful in overcoming barriers to enter into a start-up?

Particulars	Count
Access to coworking spaces and incubation centers	2
College / University entrepreneurship programs	22
Entrepreneurial workshops and training sessions:	6
Family and friends	30
Government initiatives and startup support programs	7
Mentorship from experienced entrepreneur	4
Networking events and industry connections	1
Peer support groups	4

Source: Primary Data

When asked which support systems are most helpful in overcoming barriers to starting a business, 2 students mentioned access to co-working spaces and incubation centers, while 22 students cited college or university startup programs. 6 students found entrepreneurial workshops and training sessions helpful, and 30 students said family and friends were the most supportive. 7 students chose government initiatives and startup support programs, 4 mentioned mentorships from experienced entrepreneurs, and 1 student valued networking events and industry connections. Additionally, 4 students found peer support groups beneficial.

THOSE WHO ARE NOT WILLING TO ENTER INTO START-UP AFTER COMPLETING GRADUATION

Table 7.10 How much do these factors create barriers for you to enter into a start-up?

Particulars	Major Barrier	Significant Barrier	Moderate Barrier	Slight Barrier	Not a Barrier
Lack of financial resources	2	4	0	2	4
Fear of failure	2	4	0	2	4
Lack of entrepreneurial knowledge/skills	2	4	3	1	2
Lack of access to networks and mentors	2	3	4	1	2
Regulatory and legal challenges	1	6	1	1	3
Social and family expectations or pressure	3	2	2	2	3
Lack of confidence and self-belief	3	1	3	3	2

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that girl students who are not willing to enter into a start-up are neutral about all the factors that create barriers for starting their own start-up. It includes lack of financial resources, fear of failure, lack of entrepreneurial knowledge/skills, lack of access to networks and mentors, regulatory and legal challenges, social and family expectations or pressure and lack of confidence and self-belief.

Hypothesis Testing

$\mathbf{H_0}$ = There is no significant relationship between having a family member in business and motivating factor for starting a start-up.

8.1 Mann-Whiteney Test Statistics[a]					
	Financial independence	**Passion for innovation**	**Desire for flexibility and work-life balance**	**Making a social impact**	**Pursuing personal challenges and growth**
Mann-Whitney U	629.000	543.500	660.500	600.000	595.500
Wilcoxon W	1064.000	1671.500	1788.500	1728.000	1030.500
Z	-.635	-1.597	-.235	-.928	-1.091
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.525	.110	.814	.353	.275
a. Grouping Variable: In your family, is anyone involved in business?					

Source: Primary Data

Mann-Whiteney U test is used for testing the above hypothesis. The test result shows that the p-value is more than 0.05 for all the factors considered under factors motivating for starting a startup, therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, i.e., There is no significant relationship between having a family member in business and motivating factor for starting a start-up. It can be concluded that having a family member involved in business does not significantly influence the importance of these motivational factors for starting a business among the participants.

$\mathbf{H_0}$ = There is no difference in the barriers to starting a startup based on the class or year of study.

8.2 Kruskal Wallis Test Statistics[a,b]							
	Lack of financial resources	Fear of failure	Lack of entrepreneurial knowledge/skills	Lack of access to networks and mentors	Regulatory and legal challenges	Social and family expectations or pressure	Lack of confidence and self-belief
Chi-Square	3.467	.769	2.463	2.802	1.613	1.510	.621
df	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.177	.681	.292	.246	.446	.470	.733
a. Kruskal Wallis Test							
b. Grouping Variable: Studying in							

Source: Primary Data

Kruskal Wallis test is used for testing the above hypothesis. The test result shows that the p-value is more than 0.05 for all the factors considered under barriers for starting a startup, therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted, i.e., There is no difference in the barriers to starting a startup based on the class or year of study. It can be concluded that the perception of these barriers to entrepreneurship is similar regardless of the student's year of study.

9. DISCUSSION

This study will benefit educators, policymakers, and support organizations by providing insights into the barriers and motivations of female undergraduate students in startups, helping them to tailor support programs and resources more effectively.

Future research could explore the impact of targeted mentorship programs on overcoming perceived barriers to entrepreneurship among female students, or investigate the effectiveness of different types of startup support systems in fostering business success for women. Additionally, examining the role of social networks and family support in shaping entrepreneurial intentions could provide deeper insights.

Conclusion

The survey results reveal varied perspectives among students regarding startup initiatives. While some students reported that their college occasionally organizes startup-related workshops or seminars, others indicated that such events are planned or held regularly. Support for female students by college for start-ups includes female-focused funding and mentorship programs, though some students are unaware of these resources. Many students expressed a willingness to enter into start-up after graduation, with a preference for startups in food and beverage and fashion and apparel. Major motivational factors for entering into a start-up includes pursuing personal challenges and growth and achieving financial independence, while common barriers involve a lack of financial resources, lack of entrepreneurial knowledge/skills and lack of confidence and self-belief. Family and friends, along with college/university entrepreneurship programs, are viewed as the most helpful support systems. Students who are hesitant about starting a business generally remain neutral on various barriers.

The result of hypothesis testing reveals that there is no significant relationship between having a family member in business and the motivational factors for starting a startup. Additionally, there are no significant differences in perceived barriers to starting a business across different years of study.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

A STUDY OF SOCIOECONOMIC CONDITIONS AMONG MIGRANTS IN NAVI MUMBAI

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Abstract

This study examines the socioeconomic conditions of migrants in Navi Mumbai, focusing on their integration, challenges, and opportunities. Navi Mumbai, a rapidly expanding urban centre, has become a destination for migrants seeking better livelihoods and improved living conditions. Despite economic growth, migrants face various socioeconomic difficulties that affect their quality of life. The research uses a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gain a comprehensive understanding of migrants' experiences. The study explores areas such as employment status, income, access to essential services like healthcare and education, housing conditions, and social integration. Initial findings suggest that although migrants play a significant role in the local economy, they face challenges such as low-paying jobs, substandard housing, and limited access to public services. These difficulties are worsened by inadequate policy measures and social exclusion. The study also focuses into the strategies migrants use to cope with these challenges and the role of community networks in supporting them. It stresses the need for focused policy reforms and stronger community support to improve migrants' living conditions. This research aims to inform policymakers, urban developers, and community organizations about effective strategies to uplift the migrant population in Navi Mumbai. By exploring these issues, the study adds to the understanding of migration patterns and socioeconomic integration in fast-growing urban areas.

Keywords: **Employment disparities, Social inclusion, Policy reforms, Migration patterns, Economic challenges, etc.**

Paper received - 8th September 2024, Paper revised - 29th October 2024, Accepted - 28th November 2024

Introduction

Migration has been a defining factor in shaping urban centres across the world, with people moving in search of better economic opportunities, living conditions, and social mobility. Navi Mumbai, envisioned as a planned satellite city to decongest Mumbai, has emerged as a significant destination for migrants. The city's growing infrastructure, economic opportunities, and residential appeal have drawn large numbers of individuals and families from different parts of India. While this influx contributes to the city's rapid development, it also presents challenges related to the socioeconomic conditions of the migrant population. Migrants, while integral to the city's economy, often face various socio economic difficulties. These challenges include unstable employment, low wages, poor living conditions, and limited access to essential public services such as healthcare and education. Such factors affect the overall quality of life for migrants, making it essential to study their specific conditions to better understand the dynamics at play. This study focuses on the socioeconomic realities faced by migrants in Navi Mumbai. It explores how these migrants navigate employment opportunities, housing affordability, and social inclusion. By examining their access to resources and public services, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic challenges experienced by the migrant community. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research seeks to capture both statistical trends and personal narratives. The findings will offer valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and social organizations, helping them develop effective strategies to improve the living conditions of migrants. In a rapidly urbanizing region like Navi Mumbai, understanding and addressing the socio-economic needs of its migrant population is critical for fostering inclusive growth.

Objective of the study

To analyse the socioeconomic challenges faced by migrants in Navi Mumbai, focusing on employment, housing, and access to public services.

To explore the role of community networks and policy interventions in improving the living conditions of the migrant population.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant increase in the income of the migrant population after migration to Navi Mumbai.

Literature Review

The literature on migration and urbanization in India highlights significant socio-economic challenges faced by migrants in cities like Navi Mumbai. Migrants often move to urban centers in search of better employment but end up in low-paying, insecure jobs within the informal sector (Oberai & Singh, 1983; Deshingkar & Akter, 2009). Studies show that migrant populations generally have lower educational attainment, limiting their access to formal employment (Bhagat, 2011; Dholakia, 2013). Health and living conditions are also concerns, as many migrants reside in overcrowded, unsanitary environments with limited access to healthcare (Desai & Banerji, 2008). In Navi Mumbai specifically, researchers like Patel (2015) and Nayyar (2019) observe that while there are employment opportunities, income stagnation and inadequate public services remain significant challenges for migrants. The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) and the Census of India provide extensive data on migration patterns across cities. The Census of India 2011 highlights the large influx of migrants into urban centers, noting economic opportunities as a primary driver. These reports confirm that cities like Navi Mumbai are key destinations for rural-to-urban migrants, as they offer relatively stable employment prospects despite socioeconomic challenges. The National Sample Survey (NSS) 2017-18 also documents the types of employment that migrants typically find in urban areas, revealing that a significant portion of migrant workers is engaged in the informal sector. According to the Report on Urban Employment and Unemployment by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, migrants face socio economic difficulties like wage instability, inadequate housing, and limited social security, especially in cities with rapidly growing populations. This report supports research by Desai & Banerji (2008) by showing that migrants struggle with access to essential services and are more vulnerable to economic shocks. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21 further highlights that migrants in informal employment often lack access to job security, pensions, and health benefits, which exacerbates income inequality and reduces their economic mobility.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses an in-depth socioeconomic analysis of the migrant population in Navi Mumbai, focusing on four key dimensions: income levels, employment patterns, educational attainment, and health conditions. The research will assess how migration has impacted the economic status, employment opportunities, and job security of the migrant

population, while also examining their access to education and healthcare services. The study is limited to migrants residing in Navi Mumbai and will gather data through surveys, interviews, and secondary sources. It aims to identify patterns and trends in the socioeconomic status of these migrants and to highlight challenges related to income disparity, job security, educational opportunities, and healthcare access. The findings of this study are intended to provide a comprehensive understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of migrants in Navi Mumbai, with a focus on both skilled and unskilled labor, and their integration into the urban economy. This study will not extend to nearby regions or non-migrant populations for comparison, keeping its focus on the targeted migrant demographic within Navi Mumbai.

Research Methodology

The research methodology for this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to analyse the socio economic conditions of migrants in Navi Mumbai. A purposive sampling method will be used to select 300 respondents from diverse employment sectors, focusing on both skilled and unskilled migrants. Primary data will be gathered through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews to assess income, employment, education, and health conditions. Secondary data from government reports and census data will complement this. Quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis. The study will focus on Navi Mumbai, with limitations related to self-reported data and the exclusion of non-migrant populations for comparison. Male participants (n=150): Mean age = 32.4 years, with a standard deviation of 6.2 years. Female participants (n=150): Mean age = 30.7 years, with a standard deviation of 5.8 years.

Data Analysis

The socioeconomic conditions of migrants have emerged as a vital area of study, especially in rapidly urbanizing regions like Navi Mumbai. As cities grow and attract a diverse population, understanding the socioeconomic dynamics of migrants is essential to grasp the challenges and opportunities they face. This study delves into various facets of migrant life in Navi Mumbai, with a specific focus on income levels, employment patterns, educational attainment, and health conditions. By thoroughly examining these dimensions, the research aims to provide a holistic perspective on the migrant experience within the city. It sheds light on the ways in which migration influences socioeconomic well-being and

identifies critical areas where targeted policy interventions and support can be implemented to enhance the quality of life for migrants and foster their successful integration into urban society.

Variable	Before Migration	After Migration	Percentage Change
Average Monthly Income	₹10,000	₹15,000	+50%
Employment in Formal Sector	20%	35%	+15%
Unemployment Rate	10%	5%	-5%
Education (Above 10th Grade)	40%	60%	+20%
Access to Healthcare	50%	70%	+20%
Self-Reported Health Issues	25%	20%	-5%

Source- Primary Data Collection

Income

Before Migration: The average monthly income of the migrant population was ₹10,000.

After Migration: This increased to ₹15,000, reflecting a 50% rise.

Interpretation: The 50% increase in average monthly income, from ₹10,000 to ₹15,000, indicates that migration to Navi Mumbai has indeed provided the migrant population with better job opportunities and higher earning potential. This rise can be attributed to the availability of diverse employment options in urban settings, such as in industries, services, and the informal sector, which may not have been as accessible in the migrants' places of origin. The city's economic growth and demand for labor across various sectors have likely contributed to this income enhancement.

However, while the income growth is significant, it may not entirely translate into improved living standards for migrants. Urban areas, including Navi Mumbai, typically have a higher cost of living, encompassing expenses such as housing, transportation, healthcare,

and education. These costs may offset the increase in income, leaving migrants with limited disposable income to improve their quality of life. Thus, while migration has facilitated economic betterment through higher wages, the associated urban challenges such as inflation and increased expenditure on basic necessities must also be considered to gain a comprehensive understanding of the migrants' socio-economic conditions.

Employment Patterns

Before Migration: Only 20% of the migrants were employed in the formal sector, with an unemployment rate of 10%.

After Migration: Formal sector employment increased to 35%, and the unemployment rate dropped to 5%.

Interpretation: The increase in formal sector employment from 20% to 35% highlights a significant shift towards more stable and structured job opportunities for migrants in Navi Mumbai. This transition is important because formal sector employment often provides benefits such as regular wages, social security, health insurance, and other employee protections, which are generally absent in the informal sector. The greater access to formal employment indicates that Navi Mumbai's labor market offers diverse opportunities that are more conducive to career development and economic security compared to the migrants' places of origin, where informal work might have been the predominant source of livelihood.

The reduction in the unemployment rate from 10% to 5% further reflects the availability of better job prospects in the city. This improvement suggests that the economic environment in Navi Mumbai is more dynamic, with industries and services capable of absorbing a larger workforce. The city's planned infrastructure and proximity to economic hubs likely play a role in creating employment opportunities, attracting businesses, and fostering entrepreneurial ventures that can support a growing population. However, it is important to note that while formal employment has increased, many migrants may still face challenges related to job stability, wage levels, and skill mismatches, which can impact their long-term economic mobility. Hence, while the shift towards formal employment and lower unemployment is encouraging, there remains a need for continuous support and policies that promote sustainable livelihoods and skill development for migrants.

Educational Attainment

Before Migration: 40% of the migrants had education above the 10th grade.

After Migration: This increased to 60%.

Interpretation: The increase in the proportion of migrants with education above the 10th grade, from 40% to 60%, suggests a positive shift in educational attainment following migration to Navi Mumbai. This improvement may reflect better access to educational institutions and training centers available in the city, providing opportunities for younger members of migrant families to pursue higher education or vocational courses. The availability of schools, colleges, and skill development programs in an urban setting can enable migrants to enhance their qualifications, making them more competitive in the job market. This rise in educational levels may indicate a conscious effort among migrants to improve their skills and qualifications in response to the demands of Navi Mumbai's labour market.

The city's economic environment, characterized by formal employment and varied job sectors, might encourage migrants to seek further education or training to secure better employment opportunities and career growth. This focus on education and skill development can also have inter-generational benefits, as improved educational attainment within families can lead to better economic prospects for future generations. However, while the data shows an upward trend in educational attainment, it is crucial to examine whether migrants have equal access to quality education and whether financial constraints or other barriers still exist. Ensuring that all migrants can benefit from educational opportunities is essential for fostering social inclusion and enabling sustainable socioeconomic progress.

Healthcare Access

Before Migration: Only 50% of migrants had access to healthcare facilities.

After Migration: This rose to 70%.

Interpretation: The increase in healthcare access from 50% to 70% demonstrates that migration to Navi Mumbai has positively impacted the availability of health services for many migrants. This improvement could be attributed to the city's relatively better healthcare infrastructure, including government hospitals, private clinics, and health centres, which may not have been as accessible in the migrants' places of origin. The proximity to

various healthcare facilities within an urban setting likely contributes to better access for routine check-ups, emergency care, and specialized treatments, enhancing the overall well-being of the migrant population.

The fact that 30% of migrants still lack adequate healthcare access suggests that significant barriers remain. These barriers may include the high cost of healthcare, especially in private facilities, which can be prohibitive for low-income migrants. Migrants residing in informal settlements or on the outskirts of the city might face difficulties due to the limited availability of nearby healthcare services, lack of health insurance, or even language and cultural barriers that can affect their ability to seek care. This indicates a need for targeted interventions to address these gaps, such as expanding affordable healthcare options, increasing outreach programs, and improving health awareness among migrant communities to ensure equitable access for all.

Health Conditions

Before Migration: 25% of the migrants reported health issues.

After Migration: This dropped to 20%.

Interpretation: The reduction in the percentage of migrants reporting health issues, from 25% to 20%, suggests a modest improvement in the overall health conditions of the migrant population following their move to Navi Mumbai. This decline could be linked to better access to healthcare services and medical facilities in the city, which might have facilitated timely diagnosis and treatment, contributing to improved health outcomes. Urban areas often offer better sanitation, nutrition, and preventive care, which can help reduce the prevalence of certain health issues.

The relatively small decrease of 5% also indicates that significant health challenges persist among the migrant population. These challenges may be associated with factors such as inadequate living conditions in informal settlements, which could expose migrants to poor hygiene, overcrowding, and environmental pollution. Job-related stress, especially for those employed in physically demanding or insecure occupations, can further exacerbate health problems. The physical and mental strain associated with urban living, combined with factors like insufficient rest, lack of recreational facilities, and limited social support networks, may continue to impact the health of migrants adversely.

The paired t-test calculations for income before and after migration:

The Given Data:

An Income Before Migration: ₹10,000, ₹9,000, ₹11,000, ₹9,500, ₹10,500, ₹8,500, ₹12,000, ₹9,800, ₹8,700, ₹9,300

An Income After Migration: ₹15,000, ₹14,500, ₹16,000, ₹14,800, ₹15,500, ₹14,000, ₹16,500, ₹14,900, ₹14,200, ₹15,000

For each pair, subtract the income before migration from the income after migration to get the difference.

An Income Before (₹)	An Income After (₹)	Difference (After - Before)
10,000	15,000	5,000
9,000	14,500	5,500
11,000	16,000	5,000
9,500	14,800	5,300
10,500	15,500	5,000
8,500	14,000	5,500
12,000	16,500	4,500
9,800	14,900	5,100
8,700	14,200	5,500
9,300	15,000	5,700

Source - Primary Data Collection

The mean difference ($\bar{d}$) is the sum of the differences divided by the number of pairs (n = 10).

Mean Difference = 5000 + 5500 + 5000 + 5300 + 5000 + 5500 + 4500 + 5100 + 5500 + 5700/10

Mean Difference = 52100/10 = 5210

To calculate the standard deviation, first compute the squared differences between each difference and the mean difference.

Difference	(Difference - Mean Difference)	(Difference - Mean Difference)²
5,000	5,000 - 5,210 = -210	(-210)² = 44,100
5,500	5,500 - 5,210 = 290	(290)² = 84,100
5,000	5,000 - 5,210 = -210	(-210)² = 44,100
5,300	5,300 - 5,210 = 90	(90)² = 8,100
5,000	5,000 - 5,210 = -210	(-210)² = 44,100
5,500	5,500 - 5,210 = 290	(290)² = 84,100
4,500	4,500 - 5,210 = -710	(-710)² = 504,100
5,100	5,100 - 5,210 = -110	(-110)² = 12,100
5,500	5,500 - 5,210 = 290	(290)² = 84,100
5,700	5,700 - 5,210 = 490	(490)² = 240,100

Source - Primary Data Collection

44,100 + 84,100 + 44,100 + 8,100 + 44,100 + 84,100 + 504,100 + 12,100 + 84,100 + 240,100 = 1,148,000

Now, divide by the number of observations minus 1 (n – 1 = 9) to get the variance:

Variance = 1,148,000/9 = 127,555.56

Finally, take the square root of the variance to get the standard deviation (s):

Standard Deviation(s) = $\sqrt{127,555.56} \approx 357.08$

The formula for the t-statistic in a paired t-test is:

$$t = \frac{\text{Mean Difference}}{\frac{\text{Standard Davitation}}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

Substitute the values $t = \frac{5210}{\frac{357.08}{\sqrt{10}}}$; $t = \frac{5210}{112.92} \approx \mathbf{46.11}$

Using a t-distribution table with n-1 = 9 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.05, the critical t-value is around 2.262. Since the calculated t-statistic (46.11) is far greater than 2.262, we reject the null hypothesis.

Suggestions

As Navi Mumbai continues to attract a diverse migrant population, understanding their socioeconomic conditions becomes increasingly crucial for effective urban planning and policy-making. This research delves into the multifaceted impact of migration on various aspects of life for migrants in the city, particularly focusing on income levels, employment patterns, educational attainment, and health conditions. By identifying key challenges and disparities faced by this population, the study aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers to develop targeted interventions that cater to the specific needs of the migrant community. The findings reveal that while migration offers the potential for improved economic opportunities, it often comes with significant hurdles, such as job insecurity and limited access to essential services. To address these challenges, the research recommends several initiatives, including enhancing access to quality education and healthcare services, which are fundamental for fostering human capital and improving overall well-being. Additionally, promoting skill development programs and creating job opportunities tailored to the abilities of migrants can facilitate their economic integration and income growth. Ultimately, these interventions are designed to promote better integration of migrants into the urban fabric of Navi Mumbai, contributing to their overall well-being and fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment for all residents.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of the socioeconomic conditions of migrants in Navi Mumbai, focusing on their income levels, employment patterns, educational attainment, and health conditions. The findings highlight both opportunities and challenges faced by migrants, revealing significant disparities that exist within this population. While migration often leads to better job prospects and economic resources, many migrants experience job insecurity, low wages, and limited access to essential services. The research underscores the need for targeted policies to address these disparities, such as improving access to quality education and healthcare, enhancing job opportunities through skill development programs, and supporting economic stability. By prioritizing these areas, policymakers can promote the successful integration of migrants into the city, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and equitable urban environment. Such efforts will benefit not only migrants but also the broader community, contributing to social cohesion and economic growth in Navi Mumbai.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

HOME AND THE HOMELAND: EXAMINATION OF SELECT POEMS BY ALOK V. MENON

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Abstract

The intersection of gender and diaspora and how it has impacted each other has been less explored within diaspora studies as opposed to diaspora as a historical and contemporary condition that has embraced issues of transnationalism, globalization, hybridity, and multiculturalism (Mehta, 2015). The definition of Diaspora has broadened from its understanding as a historically displaced community that shared a common desire to return to the homeland to the emphasis of diaspora being stateless, associating it with the ideas of transnationalism. Many feminist thinkers such as Tina Campt and Deborah Thomas have found that the idea of diaspora has been limited to the discussions on travel, migration and homeland which leads to reassertion of binary positions of the term. Furthermore, it also privileges the mobility of masculine subjects as the primary agents of diasporic formation and hence propagates a general masculinism in the conceptualization of diasporic communities. The paper analyzes texts by Alok Vaid Menon and examines the issues of queerness through the lens of the diaspora. The paper aims to understand the significance of the term diaspora in the context of queer narratives. By analyzing Alok V. Menon's poems and other critical writings the paper discusses how the writer negotiates with their sexual and gender identity and conveys their angst about "belonging" to his homeland and their self.

Keywords: **Alok Menon, belonging, Diaspora, Home, Queer**

Paper received - 17th Nov 2024 Revised - 23rd November 2024 Paper accepted - December 16th 2024

Introduction

Critical texts examining the intersection of queerness and the diaspora are relatively few, but scholars like Gayatri Gopinath have made important contributions to this area. In her book Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures (2005), Gopinath explores the gaps in diasporic feminist discourses, particularly how nationalism is often defined through heterosexual norms. She argues that feminism has not sufficiently

addressed how these heteronormative structures are carried into the diaspora, reinforcing traditional patriarchal assumptions. Gopinath argues that queer desires do not transcend or remain peripheral to the histories of racism and colonialism but instead become central to their telling and remembering. She believes that there is no queer desire without these histories, nor can these histories be told or remembered without simultaneously revealing an "erotics of power" (2). Therefore, there is a need to destabilize the adjacent relationship between nationalism and heterosexuality which is exactly what makes the notion of queer diaspora so compelling. According to Gopinath, a diasporic framework looked at from the perspective of the queer effectively exploits the parallel relationship between nation and diaspora on the one hand, and between heterosexuality and queerness on the other. Hence, she states that queerness is to heterosexuality as the diaspora is to the nation.

Gopinath also challenges how homosexuality has been encoded in the Euro-American context as she reads various cultural forms and practices both constituting and constituted by various South Asian diasporic queer. She argues that even though queer diasporic cultural practices and forms are produced through the workings of transnational capitalism, at the same time, they also provide the means to critique the logic of global capital itself. In Impossible Desires, Gopinath argues that the queer South Asian Diaspora can be seen as a tool that effectively challenges the idea of modernity and the several notions associated with its narratives of progress and development. What the South Asian queer diaspora also does is interrogate various South Asian nationalist narratives that imagine and consolidate the nation in terms of organic heterosexuality. Interestingly, in Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora (2018) Gopinath argues that the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora alter the normative ways of seeing and knowing. This aspect has been essential to the production, containment and disciplining of sexual, racial, and gendered bodies. To do so, these aesthetic practices delve into an excavation of the past through a "queer optic" and reassess bodies, desires and affiliations which are unimaginable within normative history. The aesthetic practice of queer diaspora, according to Gopinath, "evoke history without a capital H, one that is ingrained in small acts and everyday gestures that play out not on the stage of the nation but in the space of the region" (8). Therefore, the most important aspect that researchers need to focus on is paying attention to the submerged and forgotten means of desire, longing, affiliation and embodiment as it will pave the way for the reimagination of an alternative present and future rather than just looking at the significant events in history.

One of the most important factors to critique is the notion of gender and its construction of binaries and assignment of gendered roles for both men and women, particularly within the diaspora. Women, for instance, are not only seen as retainers of cultural identities but are also responsible for the physical reproduction in the homeland as well as the "new land". To make women the central aspect of the definition of family was one that was accepted long ago, not only in the context of the nation but also within the context of migration and diaspora. Home, therefore, becomes a primary arena within which "otherness" is imagined in terms of race, religion, nationality and gender. The "home" becomes a holy space of purity, authenticity and tradition which is embodied through the figure of the woman, who becomes the center, marked by gender and sexual oppression. This is especially problematic when understanding the queer within the diaspora. Therefore, as Gopinath believes, within the diasporic queer texts the home becomes "a particularly fraught site of contestation" (14).

One of the important interventions in this regard is made by Alok Vaid Menon who is an Indian-American writer, performance artist and media personality. Alok goes by the moniker ALOK and prefers to be addressed using the singular pronoun 'they'. Alok was born in Texas to Malayali and Punjabi immigrant parents. Alok is a gender non-conforming and transfeminine person. In 2017 Alok published their collection of poetry called Femme in Public. Alok has also published a book called Beyond the Gender Binary, published by Penguin Workshop which was released in June 2020. In one of their videos, Alok observes how their subjugation on all levels forced Alok to be a poet as they could not find anything else as powerful as ink to portray themselves. Many of Alok's poems reflect on the issue of the majority occupying the central space denying the minorities an opportunity to access those spaces. Alok who deals with the angst of gender, identity and belonging challenges the heteronormative spaces through poetry, comedy, performance, drag, fashion, self-portraiture and social media and tries to understand the complexities of gender, race, trauma, belonging and the human condition. Alok's art revolves around violence against trans and gender non-conforming people and fights against the constraints of gender norms. Alok advocates bodily diversity, gender neutrality and self-determination. Alok's poetry especially reflects on the dilemma of being a gender-non-confirming person in the diaspora. In the poem titled "Alternative Kinship, Queer, and Other Lyrics I Cannot Translate to My Grandmother" (2013), Alok expresses this angst of concealing their identity from their grandmother. The poem

does not follow a strict pattern, grammatical rules or a rhyme scheme. In one of the stanzas Alok states,

"but i want to tell my grandmother that

she is wrong. tell the woman who lived partition that she has been colonized. want to recycle words like patriarchy and system and revolution

convince her that we used to have no language for our genders and our bodies just like our love want to tell her that

the prayers she recites in her bones were scripted, like her death, like this

family" (Menon, 2013).

The entire poem narrates Alok's struggle to be part of their roots but feels completely alienated from it. Their grandmother, their native town Kerala, the language, rituals and traditions overwhelm Alok because of the non-acceptance by their grandmother and as an extension, the entire state. Alok's poems are largely autobiographical and deeply personal which contain his innermost fears and apprehensions. Gopika Jayachandran discusses the bond that Alok shares with his homeland and states, "(They) is born and brought up in Texas but, still feels a bond with Kerala, the land of (their) parents. The desire of the poet to become part of that land's tradition, to enter the world of its language beats in (them) as (their) existing identity also includes the shade of an emigrant" (Jayachandran, 2019). The poem is also a reminder of how gender identities are formed at birth and anyone who chooses to deviate is often seen as a misfit. As Alok writes,

so when she tells me that we should

wear the genders

our parents dressed us at birth

so when she tells me that

we choose to be queer because we

are selfish because we

love ourselves so much that we

hate our mothers ... (Menon, 2013).

Being queer for Alok is an act of being selfish as Alok chooses to disown the sex assigned at birth and not practice the gender that "our parents dressed us at birth". The grandmother can be seen as a link that establishes a connection between the narrator and the homeland. At the same time, she creates a lot of anxiety within Alok with her shrewd remarks. In the homeland, Alok is denied their rights because of their identity. The inability of the native culture to accept them makes Alok feel like an 'Other', as it fails to comprehend the various dimensions of gender. The Self is in constant flux with other aspects of Alok's life like the relationship that they share with their family members. It seems impossible for Alok to accommodate their queerness with their intimate relations conveys a sense of acceptance of his reality.

In another poem called "Visiting My Grandmother in Kerala" (2012) Alok misspells the word 'Kerala' throughout the poem describing their association with their roots, an association that is alive through their memories. Gopinath argues in Unruly Visions that a turn to the regional is quite often a turn to the personal/autobiographical. Evoking the region often takes the form of deeply affective, personal explorations of regional belonging or alienation. The poems written by Alok justifies this argument as Alok writes,

in kerela where

your grandmother embraces

your body like a postcard.

you: the picture from across the ocean

that comes every once in a while in the mail

plant it on the fridge:

hope that it grows when she is not watching (Menon, 2012).

Alok has a strange connection with this land. Despite Alok not being physically present in Kerala, a part of Alok has always belonged to it. Writing the incorrect spellings could also indicate Alok's appropriation of an alternate history, one that is cruel towards their gender identity. Even though India (as is now understood geographically) has a rich cultural history of acceptance of homosexuality, queerness is not treated as part of

Indian culture, as opposed to America which has a comparatively recent history of queer acceptance. Alok reiterates this feeling of being alien to this land several times in the poem. Alok writes that Alok feels like a tourist in their homeland. Any attempt to associate with this land and its history seems impossible because of their identity. G.N Devy refers to this as 'amnesia' as the colonizers have made the colonized feel ashamed of their history and forget their cultural past and heritage. In her book titled Infinite Variety: A History of Desire in India (2019) she states that India has been a homophilic nation and has a rich homosexual past. Those who believe that homosexuality is not part of the Indian culture are looking at the history of only the past 200 years, which according to her, is very shameful. This can also be seen as an act of violence on the part of the colonial masters. In Impossible Desires, Gopinath discusses the inextricable link between colonialism, nationalism, racism and migration. She argues that the diasporic queer bodies and desire are a reminder of a past filled with contradictions and violence of being uprooted, displaced and exiled in contrast to the evocation of the image of an imaginary homeland that is frozen in an idyllic moment outside history. Interestingly, Alok also tries to claim both the space of the home and the nation by making them both the site of desire and pleasure through a nostalgic diasporic imagination. Hence, Alok makes use of the metaphor of the tree to explain the feeling of being displaced and compares their predicament to that of the twigs that have been torn away from their branches, uprooted (quite literally) and displaced from the warmth of their sunshine. Alok writes,

sometimes i feel like

the portuguese /the dutch /the british

when you grant me your blessings

and spend all day cooking for me in the kitchen

do we deserve your hospitality, kerela?

we, the twigs torn from your branches, kerela

tossed across the world and forgetting the

gentle kiss of your sun, kerela" (Menon, 2013).

The heteronormative home within his poems is also what generates homoeroticism. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora consist of such archival practices that "excavate and memorialize" (Gopinath, 2018) minor histories which stand outside the purview of the official nation-centered narratives. Alok does so through their poems, archiving their every day that hints at their construction of queer selfhood in nonteleological terms. Such personal memoirs remain outside the official national narratives and hence produce forms of queer desire and identification across multiple timeframes. Alok questions the existing constructs and structures such as the idea of the 'Family' and 'Home' as these are seen as agents that re-establish patriarchy and heterosexuality. Home as a space, which is supposed to be a haven for many, traumatizes Alok and many others like them. In the poem called "Coming Out Backwards" (2013) Alok expresses a similar kind of anxiety. Alok talks about the constant displacement from one city to another to finally call a place "home". The poem almost serves as a reminder to Alok of the reasons for non-acceptance of their self. Alok writes,

> Don't forget how you ran away from this small town from this small body to become that. How you took a photo posted it on your wall and you put it on every apartment you've lived in since call it HOME call it IA MM O R ET H A NT H I SB O D Y (Menon, 2013).

Alok struggles to move away from their understanding of the Self only through one's body and renegotiate with the idea of "home". At another instance in the poem, Alok notes,

…How we spend our entire lives in search of something greater than our home towns but "THE MORE THINGS CHANGE THE MORE THEY STAY THE SAME" (that the entire world, be it new york city, be it london, be it the electric pulse of the club, the fever pitch of a rush hour subway, is totally and utterly boring (and that is beautiful amen) is repulsive and sterile and useless (and that is beautiful amen) is unforgiving, stale, and trite (and that is beautiful amen) because it is screaming at you as you run away saying I AM NOTHING just like where you came from and where you are going which means that COMING OUT was a lie just like the Apple Maps directions which lead you into an ocean when you typed "HOME" (Menon, 2013).

The poem written in fragmented words perhaps indicates this as one's identity in flux and therefore foregrounds the impossibility of comprehending it. The idea of the

"Home" is also not stable as even the act of "Coming Out" is a farce and all the places that one goes are ultimately the same. This space of the "outside" is nothing but a myth because there is no place that one can claim as their own. In many of Alok's poems, the home can be seen as an already ruptured space. Just like many postcolonial feminist scholarships, queer studies too have been interested in the inquiry of home as a primary space of gender and sexual oppression for queer subjects. Many lesbian and gay texts have imagined the "home" as a place to be left behind, to escape to emerge into another, more liberatory space. Gopinath argues that the aesthetic practices of queer literature help us with critical modes of engaging with this difference. She even claims that it is in the realm of aesthetics that one can comprehend the imprint of these histories that have shaped the present realities. These aesthetic practices constitute an alternate archive that remains submerged within dominant epistemologies and also demand and enact a reading practice of dominant archives that renders visible their gaps, fissures, and inconsistencies. The idea of the 'home' has also been part of the discussion within the diasporic feminist theory with scholars like Ratna Kapur who argue that the debates on sexual morality that have been raised through contemporary cultural texts such as Fire (1996) directed by Deepa Mehta, must be situated to an older history of Hindu nationalist formulations of sexuality and the home. Gopinath goes a step further and suggests that feminist scholarship fails to address the production of normative and deviant sexualities as central to both the colonial and nationalist projects. She points out that even though scholars explore the various ways in which women's sexuality has been controlled and disciplined historically, they are unable to articulate how this process of controlling and disciplining within the nationalist movements operates through state-sanctioned heterosexuality. They fail to acknowledge the possibility of alternate sexualities within dominant nationalisms as they do not extend the boundaries of heterosexuality. According to Gopinath, the possibility of the existence of non-heteronormative subjectivities which challenge the logic of nationalism is never adequately addressed.

Apart from the idea of the Home, diasporic queer writers and critics are also interested in the notions of identity. Alok, for instance, talks about why they chose to be transfeminine as Alok believes that they were coerced into the assignment of 'male' at birth and prefer to rather transcend elsewhere. Alok believes that their gender shifts across time and space and a mere presentation of what society deems as masculine does not invalidate the legitimacy of the femininity within them and vice versa. Alok challenges Western society's understanding

of how a man or woman should look and critiques the systematic policing into gender normativity of gender non-confirming people to maintain the myth of uniformity within genders. Alok even defies the Western construction of the gender binary of man/woman as Alok believes that "There are infinite non-binary genders, we are not merely some third option for leftovers" (Menon, 2019).

Alok's journey to self-discovery has also led to the re-imagination of the diaspora through the lens of the queer. Alok has been vocal against several issues that impact the lives of Indian diasporic queer people in America. Alok has critiqued the appropriation of Western modernity to understand sexuality while simultaneously critiquing colonialism, racism and the ideas of nationalism. Alok has also challenged the division of gender into binaries. Therefore, through the diasporic queer practices, through the personal and the autobiographical one can look at the history of violence and the silence of queer narratives within the diaspora as Gopinath suggests. It helps in recreating an alternate history for the marginals whose voices are not part of the larger nationalistic discourse. Various other poets within the diaspora like Vikram Seth and Suniti Namjoshi have written about the diasporic queer experience before Alok and interventions like these are important as it serves as a reminder of the pluralities of experiences.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

EMPOWERING MIGRANT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: STRATEGIES FOR OVERCOMING MARGINALIZATION AND FOSTERING ECONOMIC INCLUSION

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Abstract

Empowering migrant entrepreneurs is crucial, for addressing marginalization and promoting participation for all individuals in society. This research explores qualitative research design, specifically using a case study approach to improve the socio-prospects of migrant women by concentrating on strategies like access to financial services and education programs that enhance digital skills. Through an analysis of existing data gathered from articles, case studies and NGOs like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), spanning from 2015 to 2023 in the context of BRICS nations (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). This study sheds light on the enabling factors that contribute to empowering women. The analysis of themes shows that having access, to services and support from networks and the community is essential for overcoming obstacles in starting a business venture successfully for migrant women entrepreneurs. The research argues with examples of microfinance programs and digital financial services that have helped women access the necessary resources for success. Key players in supporting migrant women entrepreneurs include the women themselves along with NGOs, government agencies that assist, and financial institutions and researchers who contribute insights. Various individuals play a role in developing an entrepreneurial environment that promotes economic advancement and tackles the specific difficulties encountered by migrant women effectively. Through providing perspectives on inclusion significance and the impact of community connections and policy measures in this field of study this research enhances discussions on empowering women economically while suggesting ways to create fairer economic prospects, for marginalized migrant women.

Keywords: **Migrant Women Entrepreneurs, Financial Inclusion, Social Capital, Economic Empowerment, BRICS Countries**

Introduction

The topic of entrepreneurs who are migrants has become increasingly relevant due to the ongoing global migration trend that has resulted in a growing migrant population in various host nations. These women contribute significantly to the economies of their societies by fostering innovation and creating employment opportunities that benefit both their host and home countries (Rena, 2009). Despite their contributions to the landscape, such women encounter various obstacles that impede their complete engagement in this ecosystem. Many hurdles arise when it comes to women's journey; from facing challenges, in accessing financial services and social connections to limited educational opportunities essential for success as an entrepreneur (Rena, 2009). It is crucial to address these obstacles not only for the benefit of women's well-being but also to promote a more inclusive economic development trajectory. Migrant women entrepreneurs often find themselves pushed to the margins and denied access to opportunities that local entrepreneurs take for granted (Rena, 2009). They grapple with issues like lack of funding resources and support systems like language barriers and cultural disparities in addition to discriminatory policies. When allowed to thrive and excel in their endeavours these women have the potential to introduce ideas and play a role in driving economic growth forward. It is crucial to assist women in addressing obstacles they face as this enables us to harness the assets they possess such as diverse viewpoints and business prospects stemming from their homelands (Rena, 2006).

Research conducted in the past has shown that the entrepreneurial endeavours of women can significantly contribute to reducing poverty and generating employment opportunities in areas. However, these businesswomen encounter challenges, like restricted access, difficulties with language, and a deficit in social connections (Paul & Rena, 2024). Different solutions have been suggested to overcome these hurdles, such as microfinance programs, management, and entrepreneurial initiatives rooted in community network support (Rena, 2006). Despite the benefits of initiatives promoting access and online banking services, migrant women entrepreneurs have yet to show significant progress in various regions across the globe requiring more in-depth examination to identify effective strategies, for diverse contexts (Rena, 2009). There is still a lack of extensive studies highlighting successful approaches implemented in the BRICS nations comprising Brazil, Russia India China and South Africa. Many research studies tend to neglect the economic backgrounds of these nations and how strategies and programs can be customized to provide improved assistance to migrant entrepreneurs living there (Zhu, Wang, & Li, 2023). Moreover, financial inclusivity

is frequently addressed separately; it is vital to investigate how elements like community connections and access to resources play a role, in empowering migrant women entrepreneurs (Rena, 2009; Paul & Rena, 2024).

This study seeks to investigate ways to address the marginalization faced by migrant women entrepreneurs and promote their participation, in the BRICS nations specifically. The research will pinpoint measures and tactics that enable these women to gain empowerment, improve their access and establish a more inclusive environment for entrepreneurship. By combining information from studies and real-life examples this study will offer insights into how social connections, financial knowledge, and digital integration play a role in empowering migrant women entrepreneurs (Paul & Rena, 2024). This article presents a perspective on empowering women by showcasing effective approaches and pinpointing gaps in existing research efforts. The major impact of this study is its provision of practical guidance for policymakers' practitioners and scholars to enhance an inclusive environment for entrepreneurial endeavours, among migrant women. Overcoming their challenges will not just enhance their prospects but also propel overall economic and social progress (Rena, 2006; Paul & Rena, 2024).

Understanding the obstacles and possibilities encountered by migrant women entrepreneurs is essential for developing inclusive policies that support their success in the business world. Studies by researchers like Poggesi and Mari (2024) Solano and Xhani (2020) and Ogbari et al., (2024) underscore the significance of addressing these hurdles to empower women to excel in entrepreneurship. By offering them resources and support systems alongside opportunities, for inclusion, we can cultivate an entrepreneurial landscape that not only benefits these women but also enriches society as a whole.

Literature Survey

Pogges is recognized as a major contributor, in this field of migrant women entrepreneurship for advocating that empowering migrant women entrepreneurs hinges upon ensuring their inclusion through access to essential services such as savings accounts and loans in host countries where they often face socio-economic challenges according to Mari (2024). Additionally, Ogbari et. al., (2024), support the importance of policies that offer customized services, for migrant women to thrive. They emphasized the significance of banking and digital financial services, in enhancing accessibility for migrant women with

the authors asserting that financial inclusion plays a crucial role in helping migrant women overcome obstacles to entrepreneurship.

Solano and Xhani (2020), suggest that social capital such as networks of relationships and community support is crucial for empowering migrant women entrepreneurs by providing them with access to information and resources that may otherwise be out of reach due to their local connections. Madein (2020) agrees with this perspective and argues that community-centered entrepreneurship approaches can utilize connections to help migrant women overcome challenges related to finances and information when starting businesses. The authors highlight the significance of monetary assets and propose that social networks offer essential assistance that formal financial services may not be able to provide.

Scholars such, as Gilani et. al., (2023) and Amin (2024) dig into how institutional policies and digital inclusion impact the entrepreneurial landscape for migrant women. According to Gilani at. al., (2023), policies that leave out women from financial and social support systems worsen their marginalization; meanwhile, Amin (2024) emphasizes the significance of resources like mobile applications in enhancing financial knowledge and market access for this demographic. Although they both recognize the implication of policies and technology in the matter at hand, they hold contrasting views when it comes to the focus on institutional versus solutions with some giving weight to one over the other.

This difference in viewpoints creates a dilemma. How can we effectively support entrepreneurs in a manner that tackles financial inclusion and social network obstacles simultaneously? How do we strike a balance between policy measures and leveraging digital tools along with social connections?

In addressing this question's complexities one must dig into the significance of inclusion, for the achievements of migrant women. Furthermore, it is crucial to explore how social connections aid in surmounting barriers. Should incorporating access be part of these endeavours? Is policy adjustment the key driver for empowerment? Lastly, we must grasp how these interactions unfold within BRICS nations, where economic and socio-political landscapes may vary from area significantly.

To tackle these challenges effectively and comprehensively a conceptual structure needs to be developed based on the research of scholars in the field. Key figures in this domain include Poggesi and Mari (2024), who highlight the significance of inclusivity, and Solano

and Xhani (2020), who center their focus on social capital. Building upon this foundation, Ogbari et al. (2024) underscore the importance of services while Gilani et al. (2023) and 2024 respectively Amin (2024) emphasizes the importance of policy and institutional backing as factors in the field of study. They highlight themes such as financial inclusion, social capital, digital inclusion, and institutional support which are closely linked to each other. Financial inclusion is supported by connections, digital resources, and favourable institutional regulations enabling women to access essential funds. Moreover, social networks play a role in helping these women navigate through information and cultural obstacles when pursuing ventures. In the meantime, technologies and regulations support the growth of these aspects.

Research Inquiry

The main focus is, on a research inquiry: How can methods that support migrant women entrepreneurs, in BRICS nations help overcome the obstacles of marginalization and promote economic participation?

Definition of Ideas

Before we explore the literature further on migrant women entrepreneurship discussions some important concepts need to be clarified. These concepts encompass.

Women who move to a country and start businesses there are known as migrant women entrepreneurs. They encounter difficulties due to factors such as their migration status, gender, and social economic background.

Empowerment encompasses a range of aspects that focus on enhancing the capability of individuals or groups to make choices freely and engage actively in social spheres by accessing resources and participating fully in activities deemed necessary for their advancement, in society as a whole. When considering women in this context of empowerment initiatives and programs aimed at fostering their growth and autonomy within communities or societies where they may face challenges related to gender disparities and economic marginalization due to their migration status.

Financial Inclusion involves making sure that everyone has access, to beneficial services, like savings accounts, credit options, and insurance policies. Particularly focusing attention towards individuals or businesses who may be marginalized or left out of the usual financial setup.

Social networks refer to the connections between individuals that help with sharing information and resources for migrant women entrepreneurs; robust social networks offer access to resources, like funding support and business opportunities.

An entrepreneurial ecosystem pertains to the setting in which entrepreneurs function. Encompassed by structures and economic and institutional elements that either facilitate or hinder their endeavours. This includes factors, like accessibility, educational opportunities, training programs, and regulatory frameworks. Common themes found in literature on this subject include...

In studying the literature, on migrant women entrepreneurs, experiences reveal themes. One key focus is on the challenges they encounter in starting their businesses. Research points out obstacles like constraints and cultural differences that migrant women entrepreneurs have to navigate. The limited access to support networks and discriminatory practices further compound these challenges (Poggesi & Mari 2024). Many women find it challenging to secure loans and navigate markets. They also feel socially isolated at times. These obstacles can make it hard for them to grow their businesses effectively (Gilani et al., 2023).

The significance of Social Capital, in Empowering Migrant Women Entrepreneurs; Social connections play a role in the business success of migrant women entrepreneurs according to a study by Solano and Xhani (2020). They suggest that capital refers to the resources within circles and serves as a key tool for migrant women to navigate obstacles like financial challenges and market entry barriers successfully. These networks offer assets such as information-sharing opportunities and professional relationships alongside backing; advantages which are often more easily accessible to local business owners when compared to migrants as highlighted by Ogbari et al., (2024).

Financial Inclusion; The topic of access to resources is widely discussed in the experiences of migrant women. Research studies such as those conducted by Ogbari, et. al., (2024), emphasize the significance of banking and digital financial services in improving inclusion for migrant women entrepreneurs in areas with inadequate traditional banking facilities. By promoting inclusion through services like loans and savings accounts via platforms migrant women can expand their businesses and play a role in advancing economic growth.

A significant focus, in the discussions, is how institutional and policy structures impact the endeavours of entrepreneurs within the literature domain. According to writers such as Mari and Amin (2024), governmental regulations are crucial in either facilitating or impeding the involvement of women in activities. Frequently lacking or not specifically designed to address the requirements of women are these policies which result in them depending largely on informal connections and microfinance organizations. Studies conducted by Madein in 2020 and Gilani et al. in 2023 indicate that providing support such as mentorship initiatives and financial education programs along with opportunities for obtaining low-interest loans can significantly contribute to the advancement of migrant entrepreneurs.

Digital Inclusion, as a Tool, for Empowering Female Entrepreneurs

Migrant women now have the opportunity to reach an audience and enhance their understanding of finances through tools while building connections with fellow entrepreneurs on their path to success according to a study conducted by Ogbari and others in 2024.

Empowering Women Who Were Once Migrant Workers to Improve Their Socio Economic Opportunities.

In their research conducted by Waluyo Handoko et.al., (2024) discussed the initiatives in Indonesia that focus on empowering women who have returned from working to become entrepreneurs. The study emphasizes the value of education in fields like marketing, new product development, and office management. These educational initiatives help reintegrate returning workers into the community by providing them with the essential knowledge to launch their small enterprises focusing on areas such, as handicrafts and locally made goods. The study highlights how digital platforms empower women to reach markets and enhance their autonomy by focusing on local economic integration strategies that support sustainable development and decrease reliance on overseas remittances.

Drawing strength, from connections. Leveraging the economic resources within local communities.

In a study by Zhu, Wang, and Li, (2024), it was found that an important factor in empowering migrant women entrepreneurs is the ability to tap into connections and local economic opportunities effectively. The research suggests that creating networks and trust among community members and using resources like agriculture or small businesses can

play a role in helping former migrant women workers succeed in business ventures. Having capital. Such as relationships with residents and fellow entrepreneurs. Not only promotes inclusivity but also offers valuable support to migrant women as they navigate the complexities of growing their businesses. The research discovered that women who actively participated in their communities had a hard time reaching markets and financial resources while also seizing growth opportunities This helped in building a stronger and more resilient entrepreneurial environment.

In a study, by Rani, et.al., (2024), focusing on inclusion among women entrepreneurs in the Jharkhand region of India digs deeper into the significance of inclusivity for women entrepreneurs in the region. The research highlights the importance of customized solutions like banking services and microloans, alongside financial literacy programs to boost inclusivity. For migrants specifically, having access to these tailored services can help them overcome the challenges presented by traditional banking systems that often exclude individuals lacking credit history or collateral. Mobile banking provides women with the opportunity to carry out transactions conveniently and securely while also offering them the flexibility to save money and access credit when needed. Studies underscore the importance of designing financial education initiatives that are culturally attuned and custom tailored to address the requirements of women, from various cultural backgrounds so that they can actively engage in the mainstream economy.

Empowering Female Entrepreneurs through Digital Literacy Programs

A chapter, by Fadzlyn et al., (2024) on empowering women entrepreneurs from Kelantan for digital finance inclusion sheds light on the power of digital literacy for migrant women's economic prospects. Numerous women may not have formal education but exhibit substantial entrepreneurial potential that can be harnessed through guidance on digital finance tools. The study indicates that digital platforms such, as e-wallets, mobile banking, and online marketplaces provide women with avenues to initiate and expand their businesses. Communities have the opportunity to empower women by offering them training in literacy skills that are essential for handling finances efficiently and effectively engaging with customers to broaden their reach in new markets. This highlights how essential government and NGO programs are, in promoting inclusion as a means to achieve empowerment.

Exploring Challenges and Opportunities, in Building Social Connections and Guidance

Studies discussed in literature sources, like Gower et al., (2022) and Eldem (2024) examine the important role of capital and mentorship in assisting migrant women entrepreneurs to overcome the challenges they encounter in their business venture journey. Mentorship programs have been highlighted as crucial for enabling women to navigate through regulatory frameworks and grasp market dynamics while also building resilience in the face of obstacles. Mentors offer not only business guidance but emotional encouragement as well- a much-needed support, for women balancing entrepreneurship with family commitments and societal expectations. Mentorship programs play a role, in empowering women by connecting them with seasoned entrepreneurs and industry professionals to boost their self-assurance and broaden their connections for exploring fresh business prospects effectively; especially when tailored to cater to the specific challenges, at the crossroads of gender and migration status.

Gender- Exclusion, from Financial Services

Prabha Srivastavas (2024), sheds light on the issue of gender inequality in literacy that disproportionately affects migrant women entrepreneurs. Financial organizations frequently view women from marginalized communities as borrowers. This perception hinders their ability to secure funding from conventional sources like banks or venture capitalists. Migrant women encounter obstacles due to discrimination stemming from both their gender and migrant background.

Efforts by non-governmental organizations to promote inclusivity

Government and profit organization (NGOs) efforts play a crucial role, in offering the necessary assistance for migrant women to succeed as business owners. Effective measures like enabling access to microfinance options, alongside low-interest loans and grants customized for minority entrepreneurs are vital. Research indicates that implementing these policies can effectively address the challenges encountered by migrant women in launching or expanding their businesses (Kloosterman and Raths, 2019). NGOs frequently offer business coaching and support to women, in settings to assist them in establishing businesses successfully. They focus on self-reliance and collaboration as factors in promoting lasting economic empowerment among ex-female migrant workers (Mindarti et al., 2022). Through

building business connections and encouraging entrepreneurship, within the community's reach; migrant women can seamlessly reintegrate into their hometowns. Actively contribute to the economy.

Exploring How Digital Platforms Enhance Business Growth Opportunities

Online platforms are transforming the business opportunities for women by offering adaptable ways to tap into new markets effectively and efficiently. Utilizing social media channels such as Instagram and Facebook well as professional networking sites like LinkedIn empowers women to establish their brand presence online and interact with customers without the constraints of a traditional brick-and-mortar store (UNCTAD, 2021). Moreover, online marketplaces like Shopify and Etsy provide avenues for women entrepreneurs to connect with an audience ultimately broadening their customer reach and boosting sales potential. These platforms offer features to handle inventory management tasks efficiently and facilitate payment processing and product marketing efforts while cutting down on the expenses linked with physical store operations.

The move towards digitizing services is helping to break down the barriers to inclusion for migrant women in rural or underserved areas who may have limited access, to traditional banks and financial institutions.

Navigating Different Cultures and Targeting Specific Market Segments

Successful migrant women entrepreneurs often leverage their background to offer products and services that appeal to a range of customers, in both local and migrant communities. Research indicates that businesses incorporating the entrepreneur's identity tend to excel in markets by providing goods or services that connect with diverse customer demographics (Barrett and Vershinina, 2017). Migrant women can stand out in markets by combining adaptation, with entrepreneurial innovation all while staying connected to their roots.

Achieving empowerment for migrant women entrepreneurs calls for a strategy that tackles structural and societal obstacles hand in hand. It is essential to focus on initiatives like promoting inclusivity and digital proficiency while offering mentorship and facilitating access to government assistance programs for these women. Through utilizing connections and actively participating in online platforms while tailoring businesses to suit cultural norms

migrant women can successfully navigate the distinct hurdles they encounter and play a role in advancing the economies of their host nations as well as their countries of origin. The studies indicate that it is crucial to implement policies and focused initiatives that incorporate gender and migration factors to support the development of entrepreneurial environments, for women migrants.

Evaluation of the Literature, with a Critical Lens

While many studies discuss the obstacles encountered by migrant business owners in the literature world where they operate in an environment there is no unanimous agreement regarding the best tactics to tackle these hurdles effectively. Those researchers who advocate for the significance of inclusion, in finances as Poggesim and Mari, 2024 and Ogbariet et al., 2024, typically emphasize the importance of having access to financial assets as a primary method of gaining empowerment. Nevertheless, this emphasis overlooks elements such as social connections guidance from experienced individuals, and support from establishments which are just as vital for achieving success as an entrepreneur. Furthermore, in literature, there is a tendency to regard inclusion and social capital as subjects even though in reality they are closely linked together. For instance, being part of circles commonly offers the information and support to utilize financial services adequately. Existing research has mostly been fragmented concentrating mainly on nations or areas. Has failed to adequately consider the particular requirements of female migrant entrepreneurs, within the BRICS countries context. Each of these countries has its economic characteristics that may call for specific policy measures not fully covered in the current research literature.

The research analyzed provides perspectives regarding the significance of inclusion, social connections, and institutional backing, in empowering female migrant entrepreneurs. Although these aspects are broadly recognized as crucial, the research also highlights uncertainties in comprehending their interplay in varied socio-cultural settings within BRICS nations. Subsequent sections will delve into these uncertainties. Examine ways to implement these ideas in promoting an inclusive entrepreneurial environment, for migrant women.

Methodology

This paper's focus lies on exploring strategies that can empower migrant women entrepreneurs in BRICS nations to overcome marginalization barriers and promote inclusion.

To find the solution, at hand and unveil the answer's essence behind it all required research to be conducted first and foremost. Lead by selecting a target group that comprises migrant women entrepreneurs specifically operating within the BRICS nations. Brazil, Russia, India, China & South Africa respectively. These women were selected because they represent a cohort encountering distinct hurdles tied to their migration status, gender inclinations, and socio-economic adversities. As evidenced by studies migrant women encounter obstacles when venturing into entrepreneurship making them a pivotal group deserving of in-depth scrutiny (Gilani et al., 2023). Their selection was based on their backgrounds which are not often included in research studies that specifically examine the connection between migration patterns and gender dynamics in entrepreneurship settings, across BRICS nations.

A program was created that consists of financial education workshops and mobile banking services along, with networking events to support migrant women entrepreneurs based on the findings that highlighted the obstacles they face due to knowledge and restricted access, to financial resources as shown by Ogbari et al., (2024) and Mari et al., 2024). Studies have shown that including social capital interventions can help individuals overcome feelings of isolation and barriers, to access (Solano & Xhani 2020). Maris (2024) suggested that developing comprehensive and layered interventions is crucial, for empowering marginalized entrepreneurs.

Instruments were created for this purpose. Surveys gauging knowledge and availability of services; conversations with migrant women in business; and group discussions to evaluate the impact of social connections, on their endeavours. These tools were selected because they offer insight into the obstacles encountered by these women and furnish both quantitative perspectives on the success of the program. The cleaning and interpretation process was carried out with particular attention to ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, as suggested by Creswell (2014). Poggesian (2024) asserts that it is crucial to utilize mixed method approaches incorporating both quantitative information to gain insight into the obstacles that migrant women encounter in the realm of entrepreneurship.

After collecting the data they needed to clean it up and make sense of it all. For instance, by checking out how literate people were and their access to services using surveys; and by digging into interviews and focus groups to spot common themes about social networks and obstacles, from institutions. For reasons outlined in the study report, by Amin

(2024) this specific approach was chosen. It allows for not the collection of numerical data but the extraction of valuable qualitative insights. This comprehensive approach aims to enhance our understanding of how effective the intervention truly is. The research methodology was carefully selected based on insights gleaned from existing literature that emphasize the significance of grasping the aspects of entrepreneurship among women. This insight draws upon works by Ogbari et al. (2024). Gilani et al. (2023) attest that utilizing surveys alongside interviews and focus groups enables an examination of the elements that support or impede the empowerment of female migrant entrepreneurs.

Result and discussion

The key discovery of the study was that migrant women entrepreneurs, in BRICS nations, encounter obstacles concerning obtaining support and social connections as well as financial knowledge. This insight stems from surveys and interviews with migrant women entrepreneurs in these regions and holds significance because it underscores that despite increasing awareness of their impact on economies persistent obstacles hinder their complete integration into the entrepreneurial landscape. The survey found that 75 percent of the respondents mentioned facing challenges in accessing services and 82 percent noted a lack of supportive social circles for their business endeavours.

The study's review of existing literature findings focused on ideas, like exclusion, social capital, and financial literacy and how they are interconnected. Financial exclusion stands out as an obstacle reaffirm that migrant women, in underserved areas face challenges accessing credit and other financial resources hindering their pursuits as noted by Ogbari et al., (2024). According to a study by Solano and Xhani (2020), it was noted that social connections play a role in overcoming challenges. Migrant women entrepreneurs with community connections tended to achieve success in their businesses indicating that social networks are crucial for obtaining resources and information. Furthermore, the importance of knowledge was highlighted constantly backing up a claim by Mari (2024), that a lack of understanding about management and available financial services hinders business expansion.

The findings from these tools showed results and conclusions were drawn from them well. Surveys on literacy revealed that numerous respondents lacked an understanding of business finances and credit choices along with financial planning skills; this corresponds with the research, by Poggesil and Mari (2024) who suggest that these deficiencies impede

the entrepreneurial pursuits of migrant women. The interviews also uncovered that mentorship and community backing play a role in overcoming exclusion but were often found to be missing in the host nations-a sentiment echoed by the findings (Gilani et al., 2023). Nevertheless, there were conflicting results observed as some participants from BRICS countries indicated lesser challenges in accessing financial services compared to the general trend. The differences in financial inclusion levels among BRICS nations and the specific programs focused on empowering women in countries like Brazil and India could be the reasons behind this phenomenon. Local initiatives such as microfinance programs might have played a role in reducing the feeling of exclusion, in some regions-a point also highlighted by Madein (2020).

One key discovery was the impact of financial services, like mobile banking in addressing obstacles to financial inclusion effectively. People with access to services tended to experience increased business profitability and expansion. This insight is backed by Ogbari et al., (2024), who emphasized the influence of banking on improving financial inclusion for marginalized communities such as migrant women. Mobile banking offers entrepreneurs access to financial tools which helps reduce some of the typical obstacles faced with financial services provision. Therefore, the initial response to my query appears to be that empowering migrant business owners in BRICS nations demands a rounded strategy that tackles not just financial isolation but also the necessity for more robust social connections and improved financial understanding. Integrating services into empowerment initiatives is crucial for closing these disparities and nurturing a more inclusive entrepreneurial setting, for migrant women.

After reviewing all the findings and analyzing them carefully the conclusions are drawn in an order based on their significance. To begin with, the major obstacle faced by migrant women entrepreneurs is exclusion, which poses a challenge, in various BRICS countries. Despite the advancements in services and microfinance programs many migrant women still encounter obstacles in obtaining financial support, which hinders their ability to establish or expand their businesses. Additionally, the importance of connections cannot be overstated, as entrepreneurs who have ties within their communities tend to achieve better outcomes. Financial knowledge plays a role in the success of entrepreneurs as found in the study. Women who are well-versed in matters tend to run their businesses and have better access to financial resources. Mobile banking and digital financial services play a role in reducing exclusion, especially in urbanized regions, with greater technology accessibility.

When the research combined findings were compared with the literature, it was noted that the study supports the ideas of Ferreira (2021) and Paul and Rena (2024), who emphasize the importance of financial inclusion and the democratizing potential of digital platforms. After reviewing research findings alongside existing literature work reviewed as mentioned in the literature review section - like Ogbari et al., (2024) and Poggeso and Mari (2024), the study finds a correlation, with their emphasis on the significance of inclusion and the transformative capabilities of mobile banking to what my study has revealed. Additionally, backing up the viewpoints put forth by Solano and Xhani (2020) who shed light on the importance of capital and community connections, in aiding migrant women entrepreneurs. The study respectfully disagrees with research findings that imply that financial inclusion is the sole key, to empowering migrant women (Madein, 2020). This study shows that other factors, like social capital and financial literacy, are equally crucial for fostering entrepreneurship. All this now means that the study's contribution is this: the study provides a comprehensive look at the multiple barriers faced by migrant women entrepreneurs in BRICS countries and suggests a holistic approach to empowerment. It underscores the importance of combining financial inclusion, social capital, and financial literacy, while also emphasizing the potential of digital financial services in overcoming financial barriers.

This means that the study recommends that in the future we change our policies and practices as follows: policies should focus not only on improving access to financial resources but also on building strong social networks and increasing financial literacy for migrant women entrepreneurs. Furthermore, initiatives should consider the integration of digital financial services as a means to reduce financial exclusion, especially in rural and underserved urban areas. Finally, now that the study is complete, we should do more research to answer the new question that has arrived at, now that the study has satisfied the previous one: What are the specific policy interventions that can effectively enhance the integration of migrant women into the entrepreneurial ecosystem in different socio-economic and cultural contexts, particularly in non-urban settings? This question opens up new avenues for research, especially in examining the effectiveness of region-specific interventions for migrant women entrepreneurs.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

THE BUDDHIST CONCEPT OF *Nibbāṇa*: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This article embarks on a comprehensive and critical exploration of the Buddhist concept of nibbāṇa, aiming to illuminate its profound complexities and subtle nuances. By examining the philosophical foundations that underpin nibbāṇa, its spiritual significance, and the diverse interpretations found across various Buddhist traditions, the study seeks to offer a deeper understanding of this pivotal concept. Through this inquiry, it uncovers the multifaceted nature of nibbāṇa. Furthermore, the article critically engages with the practical implications of nibbāṇa, investigating how its timeless wisdom can address the pressing challenges of the contemporary world, from existential questions to the complexities of modern life. In doing so, it highlights the enduring relevance of nibbāṇa as a guiding force, both in personal transformation and in providing solutions to the dilemmas facing society today.

Keywords: **Buddhism, *Nibbāṇa*, Liberation, *Therāvāda*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna***

Paper received on 21st November 2024 Paper accepted on 28th November 2024

"Nibbāṇa is bliss supreme"

- Dhammapada

Introduction

Nearly 2,500 years ago, Gautama the Buddha introduced a revolutionary philosophy to Indian society. Gautama re-discovered the path of Dhamma (doctrine of liberating law) leading to the eradication of universal suffering. His teachings starkly contrasted the prevailing social and religious norms of the time - free from the constraints of class, caste, or rigid dogmas. He emphasised renunciation, and yet his principles were simple to follow. The teachings gained popularity as the path was open to everyone, regardless of gender. His teachings were revolutionary, offering a path to liberation even for parents without a male heir, as per the traditional Hindu law, who were otherwise excluded from this possibility of allowing them to pursue spiritual freedom with ease (Dixit, 2015). Buddha's teachings aimed to live a pure and virtuous life, free from the material world's suffering, and ultimately

attain *nibbāṇa* (liberation). Therefore, his teachings deeply resonated with ordinary people and influential rulers, including prominent figures of that time such as King Bimbisara of Magadha, King Pasenadi of Kosala, and the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, among others.

Comparative Analysis of Religious Traditions

Unlike the Hindu tradition in which the *Swarga* (Indra's dwelling) or the *Vaikuṇṭha* (*Viśṇu*'s abode) or the *Kailāsa* (Śiva's abode) a place or a thing is the aim to attain post bodily departure. In Buddhist teachings, *nibbāna* is the culmination of spiritual practice and the highest realisation of true wisdom. Before delving into the Buddhist concept of *Nibbāṇa*, it is essential to first grasp both the essence of the goal itself and the path, the practices and insights, and its journey that guide one toward its attainment. In Pali *Nibbāṇa* (in Sanskrit - *Nirvāṇa*) means extinction, freedom from desire. *Nibbāṇa* is discussed in key Buddhist texts like the Pali Canon, *Dhammapada*, and *Tripiṭaka*. The *Tripiṭaka* (the three baskets) is the foundational scripture of *Therāvāda* Buddhism, consisting of three main collections (the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Sutta Piṭaka*, and *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*) of teachings. The Dhammapada is one of the most important and widely read texts in *Therāvāda* Buddhism. It is a collection of sayings and teachings of the Buddha offering practical wisdom on how to live a moral, mindful, and peaceful life, emphasizing values such as right conduct, mindfulness, and mental discipline. The Dhammapada encourages followers to cultivate virtues like compassion, non-attachment, and wisdom to achieve enlightenment (*nibbāṇa*). It is more appropriate to state that *nibbāṇa* is an ultimate and absolute deliverance from all future rebirth, old age, disease, and death. The salvation lay in achieving *nibbāṇa* or extinction, freedom from the 'wheel of birth'. It is a supramundane state to be realised only by individual wisdom. As Gautama the Buddha teaches, if desires are conquered, *nibbāṇa* will be attained, that is, humans will be free from the misery of the cycle of birth and death. *Nibbāṇa* aligns closely with the '*Four Noble Truths*' and the '*Eightfold Path*', representing the culmination of the Buddha's teachings on liberation from suffering (Narada, 2023). The *Four Noble Truths* identify suffering as an inherent part of existence, trace its cause to desire and ignorance, affirm that cessation (*nibbāṇa*) is possible, and outline the *Eightfold Path* (*Śila* (morality, virtue) – right speech, right action, right livelihood; *Samādhī* (right type of concentration) – right efforts, right concentration, right awareness; and *Paññā* (wisdom) – right understanding, right thoughts) as the means to achieve it. The Path guides practitioners through ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom - each addressing the roots of suffering by cultivating qualities like mindfulness, right intention, and moral integrity. Following the *Eightfold Path*, one progressively eradicates all the defilements (attachments, desires, and ignorance) to clear the path ultimately to attain *nibbāṇa*, a state

free from *saṁsara* (the material world) and the complete cessation of suffering (Kirthisinghe 1984; Hart 2019). The idea of attaining liberation was present even before the Buddha. In Hinduism, *mokṣa* represents liberation from the cycle of birth, death, rebirth, and freedom from the effects of *karma*. This concept parallels *nibbāṇa* as both describe - a final liberation from worldly existence and suffering. However, *mokṣa* implies a liberation that retains some aspect of the self in union with the divine, *nibbāṇa* focuses on a complete transcendence of self-identity and attachment. In Hinduism, the journey to *mokṣa* involves a blend of personal spiritual practice, knowledge, devotion, and righteous living, all aimed at transcending the material world, recognising one's identity as soul and understanding its unity with Brahman. In contrast, Buddhism does not endorse or believe in any celestial deities, hence the journey to *nibbāṇa* involves realising the emptiness or non-self (*anatta*) of all phenomena, leading to liberation.

As time passes, new ideologies, thoughts, and mindsets challenge the past or the prevalent school of thought. Even Buddhism is not exempt from division over its teachings following the passing of its founder. After the *parinibbāṇa* of the Buddha in 483 or 400 BCE, at the Second Buddhist Council of 383 B.C.E. in India, the contemporary groups of monks formed two schools of thought namely *Therāvāda*, and *Mahāyāna* (Singh, 2006). Both the schools predominantly followed the nuance of the Buddha's teachings; however, they tweaked it according to their contemporary needs, comprehension, and, perhaps, their experience as well. The *Therāvādi* school perceive *nibbāṇa* as the end of suffering (*dukkha*), the cessation of rebirth, untainted by defilement, and the attainment of liberation from the cycle of birth and death through a personal journey. They believe in two types of *nibbāṇa* - 1. attained during life, but residual defilement remain (*sopādisesā nibbāṇa*); and 2. attained at death, complete elimination of defilements (*anupādisesā nibbāṇa*). Morality, ethics, concentration, meditation, wisdom, and insights are the peculiarities of the *Therāvādis nibbāṇa*. *Therāvādis* outline four stages leading to *nibbāṇa* - initial enlightenment, controlled detachment, complete detachment, and full enlightenment. In the case of *Mahāyāna* the *nibbāṇa* is a collective effort to help all beings to be free from the cycle of birth. *Mahāyānis* often view *nibbāṇa* as the realization of *śunyata* (emptiness), the reality as it is, and the transcendence of duality. It is considered an aspect of enlightenment that remains connected to compassion for all beings. Even *Mahāyānis* recognise two types of *nibbāṇa* - 1. Conventional *nibbāṇa* and 2. Ultimate *nibbāṇa*. Non-conceptual, non-duality, timelessness, and spacelessness, are the unique features of the *Mahāyāna nibbāṇa*. Their path to *nibbāṇa* goes through cultivating compassion and wisdom, practising *pārmitā*, and realising emptiness.

In contrast to the gradual path emphasised in other forms of Buddhism, a distinct school of thought emerged, perhaps, influenced by prevailing Hindu practices. In the 5th century, Buddhism witnessed the third school of thought, the *Vajrayāna* ('great bliss' or 'unexcelled bliss') school formed in northern India, rooted in Tibet and the Himalayan region. Hence, it is also known as Tibetan Buddhism. The *Vajrayāna* emphasises the use of *mantra*s (sacred sounds), *mudrā*s (ritual gestures), *maṇḍala*s (symbolic diagrams), and visualisation techniques as tools for meditation and achieving enlightenment more rapidly. The key belief in *Vajrayāna* is that enlightenment can be attained in a single lifetime through intense spiritual practice. Central to *Vajrayāna* path to *nibbāṇa* involves the "*guru*" or spiritual teacher, who plays a crucial role in guiding practitioners on the path. Although *Vajrayāna* is another much younger branch sprouted through the Buddha's teaching, it slightly deviates its path from the actual teaching by adopting rites and rituals.

Thus, over a period, the concept of *nibbāṇa* has evolved across various Buddhist traditions, such as *Mahāyāna* and *Vajrayāna*, each offering its own interpretation. Comparative analyses of *nibbāṇa* across Buddhist traditions, the three schools of thought, *Therāvāda* focuses on individual liberation, *Mahāyāna* emphasis on universal compassion, and *Vajrayāna*'s direct engagement with *saṁsāra* reveal a diversity of perspectives that challenge any single, definitive interpretation. This diversity enriches our understanding of *nibbāṇa*, showing it as a concept that adapts and evolves within different cultural and philosophical contexts. Each tradition offers unique insights, yet they all circle the central goal of liberation from suffering, adding layers of meaning that continue to inspire and provoke deep reflection. These diverse views contribute to the richness of Buddhist thought but also fuel ongoing debates regarding the true nature of *nibbāṇa*, the methods to attain it, and its practical relevance. Scholars have raised critical questions about its meaning, the conditions necessary for its attainment, and the implications of pursuing it. Some argue that *nibbāṇa* remains an abstract or elusive ideal, challenging the practitioner's understanding, while others contend that it risks oversimplifying the complex realities of suffering and the multifaceted path to enlightenment. This ongoing discourse continues to shape our understanding of *nibbāṇa* and its place in Buddhist practice.

Contemporary Relevance

As the world evolves with rapid societal and technological change, religious concepts face the challenge of adapting to contemporary issues. The task for modern scholars and spiritual leaders is to reinterpret ancient teachings in a way that bridges timeless wisdom with the complexities of today's

world, offering relevant and meaningful guidance. In this context, it is observed that *nibbāṇa* is not free from dualism. While Buddhism teaches that all things are interconnected, without inherent divisions, the concept of *nibbāṇa* can seem to create a split. It suggests a distinction between *saṁsāra* and *nibbāṇa* (freedom from that cycle). This might appear to go against the Buddhist idea of non-duality, which views reality as unified and whole. By aiming to reach *nibbāṇa*, one might unintentionally create a mental divide, seeing *nibbāṇa* as an escape from *saṁsāra*, rather than part of the same unified reality. The very notion of *nibbāṇa* as a state to be attained, or a goal to be reached, implies a mental distinction between what is and what could be between the suffering-filled existence in *saṁsāra* and the blissful liberation of *nibbāṇa*. This duality can create the impression of an 'escape' from *saṁsāra* rather than seeing *nibbāṇa* as an intrinsic part of the same unified reality that underlies all things. In doing so, one may unintentionally perpetuate a dualistic mindset, perceiving *nibbāṇa* as something separate or removed from the world of experience. If *nibbāṇa* is seen as a state completely detached from the world's suffering, some may view it as a retreat rather than a form of engagement or compassion. This critique suggests that aiming solely for personal liberation might imply abandoning the challenges and responsibilities of the human world rather than addressing them.

The relationship between *nibbāṇa* and ethics is complex, raising the question of whether *nibbāṇa* means rejecting moral duties or going beyond traditional ethics. If *nibbāṇa* involves absolute detachment from worldly concerns, it might seem to move away from the ethical obligations that guide ordinary life, making it appear amoral or anti-moral. However, many Buddhist views suggest that *nibbāṇa* is not about rejecting ethics but transcending conventional moral rules. In this view, reaching *nibbāṇa* leads to an ethical mindset based on compassion and wisdom, rather than following rigid rules. An enlightened being would act from spontaneous, compassionate awareness, naturally expressing ethical behaviour due to a deep understanding of interconnectedness. This idea relates to meta-ethical discussions about whether morality comes from fixed rules or the character and awareness of the individual, suggesting that *nibbāṇa* offers an ethical realisation beyond traditional moral codes.

The Buddha's teachings offer universal wisdom accessible to all. It promotes the transformation of individuals and society by cultivating inner peace, moral integrity, and wisdom. Following the path to enlightenment fosters harmony, compassion, and understanding, benefiting both personal growth and societal well-being. Ultimately, these teachings encourage mindfulness, empathy, and interconnectedness, guiding humanity toward a more just, peaceful, and enlightened world. However, the traditional teachings on *nibbāṇa* often focus on the individual's journey to liberation from suffering and rebirth,

which can emphasise personal spiritual achievement over social or collective responsibility. This focus might lead to an interpretation of Buddhism that is primarily inward-looking, potentially overlooking the importance of working for the welfare of others or addressing societal issues. Some critics suggest that this focus on individual liberation could risk diminishing the emphasis on community and social ethics. It seems that the concept of *nibbāṇa* encourages individualism.

A key question in Buddhism is whether *nibbāṇa* represents the realisation of a true self or the complete dissolution of the self-concept. Traditional Buddhist philosophy teaches *anatta* (non-self), which holds that the self is an illusion. According to this view, *nibbāṇa* would involve the total dissolution of this illusion, leaving no permanent self behind. It would mean realising that the 'self' was never truly there, leading to freedom from ego and attachment. In contrast, some interpretations, especially in certain *Mahāyāna* schools, suggest that *nibbāṇa* might involve discovering a 'true self' that goes beyond the ego but exists in harmony with the whole of reality. This raises complex questions about the nature of identity: is there a true self that *nibbāṇa* reveals, or does enlightenment mean transcending all self-concepts? Anyhow the path to liberation or further journey of *nibbāṇa* needs a 'self' to surpass. Thus, the focal issue is about identity, consciousness, and the essence of being, challenging our understanding of what it means to be a person. Buddhism highlights the fundamental nature of 'change and impermanence' as the core reality of existence, a truth that is universally experienced and observable by all beings. This inherent transience shapes the very fabric of life, reminding us that nothing remains static, and all phenomena are in constant flux. By acknowledging this, Buddhism encourages a deeper understanding of the impermanent nature of all things, offering profound insights into how to navigate life's uncertainties with wisdom and equanimity. However, the nature of *nibbāṇa*, concerning reality and consciousness, is often described in vague or paradoxical terms, making it difficult to understand from a philosophical or scientific standpoint. In Buddhist texts, *nibbāṇa* is considered the cessation of suffering and ignorance, however, it remains unclear whether it represents an actual state of consciousness, an ontological reality, or simply a psychic perspective. The Buddha's teachings emphasise that it is a deeply personal journey. Yet, the guide to this path, with no fixed destination or clear outcome, remains inherently ambiguous, inviting each person to navigate it with their own understanding and insight. This ambiguity can lead to questions about *nibbāṇa*'s true nature, as is it an actual place or state of being, a mental condition, or a conceptual framework for freedom from attachment? Thus, the concept of *nibbāṇa* resonates with profound metaphysical significance.

Nibbāṇa, a fundamental concept in Buddhism, presents a stark contrast to the Vedantic and Jain notions of liberation. While Vedanta views *mokṣa* as the union of the individual soul (*ātmān*) with the supreme reality (*Brahman*), Buddhism rejects the idea of a permanent self, defining liberation as the cessation of ego and desires. Both traditions emphasise ethical conduct, meditation, and wisdom, yet Buddhist *nibbāṇa* is distinctive in denying an eternal soul. In Northern India, Buddha's teachings found significant support. Still, Buddhism struggled to take root in the South, where Hindu traditions, royal patronage, and the rise of the Bhakti movement held sway. Unlike *nibbāṇa*, which advocates renunciation of the material world and introspection, the Bhakti movement focused on devotion through chanting, praising deities, and merging with or surrendering to the divine as a path to salvation. Bhakti saints challenged societal norms surrounding gender, caste, and class, inspiring followers across all walks of life. The decline of Buddhism by the 12th century, following the fall of the Pala dynasty in Bengal, was exacerbated by political shifts, the resurgence of Hinduism, and a shift in royal patronage.

Nibbāṇa is sometimes seen as a kind of annihilation the complete end of the self, ego, and personal attachments. This idea comes from the Buddhist belief that the 'self' is an illusion and that freedom lies in letting go of the idea of a fixed, independent identity. In this sense, *nibbāṇa* can be understood as ending this illusion, eliminating the self we hold onto. However, some Buddhist thinkers suggest that *nibbāṇa* is more of a transformation than annihilation. They view it as a shift into a new way of being one free from desires and illusions, but not a total end of existence. This perspective sees *nibbāṇa* as a state of interconnected awareness where the ego dissolves, transforming rather than erasing personal experience. If *nibbāṇa* is a transformation, then what continues or changes about the self in this state of mind or liberation? This leads us to another essential aspect of *nibbāṇa*, it calls for a steady, unrelenting effort, even without any clear vision of the outcome or a sense of how long it may take to break free from the cycle of *saṁsāra*. In today's fast-paced, materialistic world, the relevance of *nibbāṇa* is a thought-provoking subject. On the one hand, the principles of *nibbāṇa* - such as letting go of desires, practising mindfulness, and ending suffering - seem more important than ever in a society driven by consumerism and constant distractions. The Buddhist path to inner peace offers an alternative to the pressures of material success and instant gratification. However, the idea of *nibbāṇa*, which focuses on freeing oneself from worldly attachments, may seem out of reach for many people. Moreover, the Buddhist concept of *nibbāṇa* marginalizes women's spiritual agency and their narratives are overshadowed by patriarchal interpretations. The teachings enforce women's exclusion from spiritual leadership, while cultural norms limit their access to education, meditation, and monastic life. Can these

teachings be applied to modern, secular life without losing meaning? How can the timeless wisdom of *nibbāṇa* harmonize with the empirical rigour of modern science? While non-attachment offers profound insights for addressing consumerism, environmental ethics, and social justice, its practical application clashes with a world driven by economic growth and systemic inequalities. The challenge lies in balancing spiritual liberation with urgent, collective action to tackle poverty, discrimination, and ecological crises. Can inner peace coexist with the demands of tangible, systemic change? For monks, who have devoted their entire existence to this path, the journey to *nibbāṇa* is a singular focus. But for ordinary lives, the journey to *nibbāṇa* presents a unique challenge of balancing everyday responsibilities and demands of the surroundings.

Conclusion

Nibbāṇa is a complex and multifaceted concept that deserves deep thought and reflection. Traditional Buddhist teachings provide important insights into its nature, but they only scrape the surface of its full meaning and philosophical importance. *Nibbāṇa* is not a simple or fixed idea; it is dynamic, touching on metaphysics, ethics, philosophy, and psychology. Studying it offers a deeper understanding of Buddhist philosophy and encourages ongoing exploration of existence, the self, and ultimate reality. A purely intellectual comprehension of *nibbāṇa* is impossible because it is not a matter to be arrived at by logical reasoning. The path to *nibbāṇa*, while rooted in ancient wisdom, offers a timeless framework for addressing the complex challenges of the modern world. However, its relevance today requires a thoughtful re-examination, one that bridges traditional teachings with contemporary realities. This re-examination must not dilute or distort the essence of *nibbāṇa*, but rather maintain its pristine purity ensuring that its core principles of liberation from suffering, the cessation of desire, and the realisation of non-self remain intact. By doing so, the transformative potential of *nibbāṇa* can serve as a powerful antidote to the existential crises, societal fragmentation, and inner turmoil that define much of modern life. In essence, the path to *nibbāṇa* can provide a beacon of clarity and peace in an increasingly chaotic world, as long as it is approached with respect for its depth, and a willingness to adapt its timeless wisdom to contemporary needs. This makes *nibbāṇa* significant not only in Buddhism but also in the broader philosophical quest to understand human consciousness and fulfilment.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

ENHANCING INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITIES FOR PARTICIPATIVE MONITORING & EVALUATION (M&E) : LEARNING FROM MAHILA ARTHIK VIKAS MAHAMANDAL (MAVIM)

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Abstract

Policy intervention not only should aim at vulnerable section of the society being self-reliant but also possessing resilience to manage shocks (both covariant and idiosyncratic shocks). Monitoring progress and evaluating the outcomes are considered as bedrock for a good governance in any development policy implementation. To foster inclusivity in policy development and execution, it is imperative to have a dialogue between policy formulation and execution. P- M &E (Participative Monitoring and Evaluation) enables this dialogue; ensuring not just agile implementation of policies but also timely course correction to maximize impact. Any amount of epistemological research for designing intervention cannot replace the value provided by P-M&E, which provides valuable insight. Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM), an apex nodal agency for promoting Self Help Groups in the State of Maharashtra in India, has been instrumental in institutionalising participatory development and participative monitoring and evaluation in rural areas. Using a case study of MAVIM, this paper documents best practices of the capacity building process. It further unpacks the role played by grassroot level citizen's organisation (Community Management Resource Centre) and frontline development field workers (also known as Sahyoginis) in enabling effective and efficient PM&E.

Keywords: **Participative, Monitoring & Evaluation, Capacity building, Community, SHGs**

Paper received 29th November 2024, paper accepted, 3rd December 2024

Introduction

"Development brings freedom, provided it is development of people. But people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves". Julius Nyerere

Good quality governance must ensure development schemes are monitored, and evaluated appropriately, with meaningful participation of empowered citizens. Though traditionally M&E has been viewed as a control function, M&E should incorporate perspective from the affected party, the local beneficiaries who might be the least powerful. We refer to 'local level' as communities in villages, hamlets, where there has traditionally been scant implementation of development schemes. It is a cornerstone for evidence-based policy making.

To foster inclusivity in policy development and execution, there is a view that Monitoring and Evaluation needs to be Participative. Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) can be said as a process wherein primary stakeholders, i.e., the affected party are active participants and take a lead in collaborative assessment, reflection, formulating reform actions and implementing the reforms.

PM&E is not a straight out of textbook formula, it is eclectic in its approach. Methods used are specific to context and the participants can use knowledge of sociocultural norms and design a process which is relevant and heuristic. Any amount of epistemological research for designing intervention cannot replace the value of insights provided by PM&E. PM&E enables information / knowledge generation not only of why but of how. Such a collaborative process requires appropriate capability and capacity.

The development literature has studied various dimensions of women empowerment and participation including its relationship with economic development (Duflo, 2012). It is imperative women are a part of the overall development process. Any development plan would fail without the active participation of the intended community (Satish, 2001: 54). Mahila Arthik Vikas Mahamandal (MAVIM), is an apex nodal agency for promoting Self Help Groups in the State of Maharashtra, India. MAVIM with its process and capability of grass-root level institutional building, have embraced a unique approach in P M&E, especially in rural areas with limited resources and challenging socio-economic environment.

To institutionalise effective and efficient PM&E, this paper aims to document capability building initiatives (Governance, Process, People and technology) undertaken by MAVIM.

While there is a separate Program Evaluation office in the state , which focuses on external evaluation , MAVIM facilitates dual role - supporting execution of scheme (Participative Governance) and provide invaluable feedback using Participate M&E.

Objectives of the Study:

Using a case of MAVIM, the paper aims to document best practices of institutionalizing capabilities for P M&E. It further unpacks role played by grass-root level citizen's organization (Community Management Resource Centre) and front-line development field workers (also known as Sahyoginis) in enabling effective and efficient PM&E

Research Methods:

Discussions and field visits were held with MAVIM Officials at Mumbai Head Office; visits and meeting with MAVIM and SHG members in districts of Aurangabad, Yawatmal, Nanded, Nandurbar, Thane . Discussion and field visit was complemented with desk research and review. Based on the analysis of intervention / initiatives of P M&E, we attempt to identify best practices, barriers and enablers in institutionalizing P&E. A total of 40 people across the 5 districts provided valuable insights. Permissions were given to observe their processes and to attend their usual day to day meetings. Observation of their systems, structure and mechanism in place played a vital role in the study.

Participative M&E

PM&E distinguishes itself from conventional approach from a perspective of Why - objective of evaluation, how the evaluation is structured; Who is executing the evaluation; What are we evaluating and for Whom are we doing evaluation (Campilan, 2000). Monitoring and evaluation systems (M&E) are vital to fathom whether efforts towards development have succeeded or failed. Conventional M&E means an 'experts' measures performance against pre-set indicators and barometer of success and failure. Conventional M&E relies on using standardised procedures and tools. However, PM&E is more inclusive, encompassing views and aspirations of the affected party. PM&E. Involvement of people, helps in measuring the effects but also understanding how and why, adding significant value to learning. It builds pressure for greater accountability. (Guijt, & Gaventa , 1998; Guijit , 2014).

"Participatory monitoring and evaluation is not just a matter of using participatory techniques within a conventional monitoring and evaluation setting. It is about radically rethinking who initiates and undertakes the process, and who learns or benefits from the findings."

- Institute of Development Studies, 1998

P M&E aims to provide space for views, opinion and include in decision decisions the most affected but least powerful of stakeholders - the beneficences (Rossman, 2015) .

Table 1: CONVENTIONAL AND PARTICIPATIVE M&E

	Conventional M&E	**Participative M&E**
Features	It focuses primarily on external perspective and emphasizes controlled environment, using standardized methods irrespective of location	Appreciates internal and external perspective and is executed in natural social setting using standardized methods but adapted to regional context
Why	Accountability, Transparency	Accountability, Transparency Learning
Who	External Groups	Internal Group (Beneficiaries)
How	Structured, Quantitative primarily	Qualitative and Quantitative, adaptive, and agile
What	External defined criteria, focused on outcome	Focused on process and outcome
Whom	Program Management & Donors	All stakeholders

To have effective PM&E, there must be institutional 'capability'. Capability is the potential of achieving outcome. To achieve outcome, there are two important elements, Resources and Agency. Resources and agency together constitute what Sen (1985) refers to as capabilities. "Capabilities" represent many functions he or she or organisation collectively can do or potentially achieve. Appropriate resources (governance, process and systems) and agency (skills and people) is required to ensure Participative M&E is effective.(Guijt *et al.*, 1998; Chambers, 1997)

- Governance: It needs to incorporate monitoring and evaluation as an internal responsibility, and not external mandate. It should enable formal legal / operational framework to combine decision makers with section of beneficiaries who participate in M&E. The framework should enable prompt course correction base on participative monitoring and concurrent evaluation.

- Process: The process should be a democratic process with no fear of failing. It is about creating learning through experience. Since development is a multi-dimensional, cross sectoral the process should be an agile process which has partnership and knowledge across sectors and discipline. Community awareness of the PM&E process should be established.

- People: It should include people's organisations who has citizen's trust and confidence. They should have skilled facilitators and necessarily include · local community co-ordinator or other liaison person/institution. The

- Data and Technology Skills: Enabling data driven systems which are collaborative is essential. It should be supported by appropriate skills required for use of technology

In this light we explore how MAVIM Institutionalised capability to support Participative M&E.

MAVIM: A Harbinger of PM&E

Established in the international women's year of 1975, MAVIM is the State Women's Development Corporation of Government of Maharashtra. It was initiated with the direction from the Department of Women and Child Development (DWCD) as an agency for women's empowerment. The establishment of MAVIM as an apex body for promotion of SHG with a clear agenda of empowering poor women crystalised only in 2003 through a government ordinance. The primary goal of MAVIM is to establish social, economic, and political justice for women and bring in sustainable development. The SHG movement truly expanded in Maharashtra with the launching of the Maharashtra Rural Credit Project (MRCP) of MAVIM in 1994 with the funds from IFAD. MAVIM has its presence in all the 35 Districts of the state. MAVIM is working in 10 thousand villages and 251 urban cities across 35 District of Maharashtra. As on October 2018, 1.17 lakhs SHGs have been mobilised consisting 14.04 lakhs women. MAVIM has been highly successful in forging partnerships between

CMRCs and private sector banks and nearly 84% of SHGs have an outstanding bank loan. The repayment performance has been consistently above 98%. MAVIM with grass root level connect and citizen participation, provides an ideal ecosystem for PM&E.

Governance and Funding

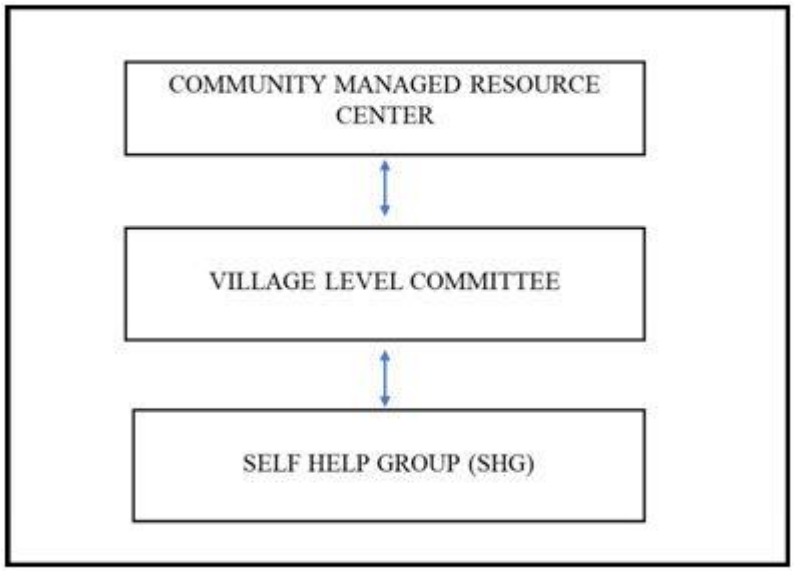
To ensure sustainability, scalability, and magnitude, it requires support and focus from the state bureaucracy leadership. For the same the governing board is constituted consisting of; Managing Director; an IAS officer along with Additional Chief Secretary, Principal Secretary of - Rural Development, Planning, Social Justice, Tribal development, Department of Women and Child Development , Development Commissioner (Industry) and Chief Executive Officer, Maharashtra State Khadi & Village Industries Board. The Chairperson is typically a woman with deep academic and / or grassroot connect. Including senior leadership from administrative offices across various department ensures that feedback is well received, suggestions implemented. MAVIM is supported by the State of Maharashtra, Women & Child Development Dept. of Maharashtra., It was also supported by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

[3]*Self-help groups is a cohort of people formed to address common problems. Mutual support and collectivism are the key hall mark of SHG. SHG have served and contributed effectively to social sectors addressing issues of poverty alleviation, development and empowerment - both economic and social*

Operations and Process

MAVIM field operation is an institutional structure comprising of three-tier community model i.e. Self Help Group at member level, Village level committee (VLC) at village level and Community Managed Resource Center (CMRC) at cluster level. SHGs are the basic instrument of empowerment of women. VLC is the 2nd level institution performing the role of coordination and facilitation between SHGs and CMRC. VLC is envisaged to focus on village development activities. VLC acts as the representative body of the SHGs in the entire village. CMRC is a conglomeration of around 200 SHGs from within a radius of 25 kms. Additionally, enabling self-reliance, MAVIM has adopted two strategies: one of which is to nurture the federations directly under the MAVIM and another is to entrust the local NGOs with the responsibility of building capacities of the federation leaders to make them self-reliant organisations.

Figure 1 - Structure of MAVIM



Source : Author's creation

CMRC is a people's organisation run on the democratic principles of the people, by and for the people. The CMRC is managed by a Representative Governing Body (RGB). Adopting the principle of rotational leadership, SHG village level committee elects one representative from each village. RGB acts as a mediating body between the village and the CMRC. It is the responsibility of RGB to instill the values of democratic institutions, transparency and ensure effective P M&E.

Agency and People Building Initiatives:

MAVIM provides strong professional and administrative support in the shape of a CMRC Manager and an Accountant as well as field workers (Sahayoginis). The name 'Sahyogini' means a companion, a friend who handholds and provides help when required. Employed by CMRC, they are the field workers who create capacity, trust and provide support among the SHG. Sahyogini not only functions as a field worker of the CMRC, but also are trainer for members. Sahyogini's are trained not only in SHG functionary, but also on responsibility of government office bearers such as police in charge, gram panchayat sarpanch, Asha workers and PHC. They are trained in various aspects of data collection, interviews as well. Sahyogini's work alongside the members to enhance their capacity and make SHG self-sufficient in every respect. It is kind of a paradox, Sahyogini themselves as a quasi-government representative are answerable to the very person whom they train.

Technology and Data:

MAVIM uses technology to track the activities of CMRC and to empower its members. Recently it launched an e-business portal with a goal to establish social and economic growth through Sustainable Development. CMRC and Sahyoginis are also connected through digital technologies to the VLC and the Head office, enabling timely and seamless information flow which enables survey Computer-Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) tools as well as support.

TABLE 2: DIMENSION - INITIATIVE - IMPLICATION

Environment Dimension	MAVIM Initiatives	Implication
Governance	− MAVIM is headed by an IAS officer with Senior Bureaucrats on the Board − Dedicated funding from Government and Multilateral agencies − CMRC meetings and bottom-up feedback process.	− Structure and Interface with Senior leadership with appropriate authority and voices − Representation at appropriate governance forum during planning and decision making − Appropriate funding and resource support − Appropriate legal frameworks − Feedback loop for actioning findings from P M&E.
Process	− CMRC network across state run on the democratic principles of the people, by the and for the people − Decentralised ecosystem with effective and efficient knowledge and best practices sharing mechanism − Confluence of domain knowledge at grassroot to collaborate execution and monitoring of various development schemes	− Transparency and open communication − Learning culture − Scalable capacity − Multi sectoral/ multi-dimensional approach for problem solving − Cross sectoral knowledge
People	− MAVIM provides strong professional and administrative support in the shape of a CMRC Manager as well as field workers (Sahayoginis). − Sahyogini not only functions as a field worker of the CMRC, but also is a trainer for members. − Sahyogini's are trained not only in SHG functionary, but also on responsibility of government office bearers such as police in charge, gram panchayat sarpanch, Asha workers and PHC.	− People centric organisation − Agency building initiatives − Awareness − Local coordinator and ecosystem creation − Capacity and skills enhancement

Environment Dimension	MAVIM Initiatives	Implication
	– There are 6 resources in every CMRC covering 250 SHGs and 25 villages within 25kms radius, enabling scalable resource capacity towards – Annualised calendar of training for both CMRC functionaries are SHG members developed as per the action plan, supporting skills development and agency building	– Scalability of resources – Connect to citizens
Data and Technology	– MAVIM uses technology to track the activities of CMRC and to empower its members. – CMRC and Sahyoginis are also connected through digital technologies to the VLC and the Head office, enabling timely and seamless information flow – Trained in which enables Survey CAPI tools as well as support	– Collaborative, technology, and data driven systems – Agile process (re)design methods

PM&E Impact of MAVIM

MAVIM's initiative provided direct and non-direct impact on the governance. Direct impact was seen by providing feedback at existing policies and practices in the local self-government forum, while indirect as well as long term impact was seen through providing substantive feedback on policies to change the social norms and effect development. Some of the indicative (not exhaustive) impact are articulated below -

Facilitating Networks:

CMRC facilitated in developing a people centric institution wherein the communities participate effectively and efficiently with the objective of community development in the bigger framework of gender justice and social change. The CMRC framework not only enabled the women SHG members to get access to information and schemes of government, but it helped them to negotiate on specific issues that were of concern. It provided a platform to communicate their voice to appropriate stakeholders. It was not restricted to livelihood but also for health, education, and livelihood programmes. While they were able to negotiate better through collectivism, they were also able to provide substantive feedback with statistically significant evidence on 'what works' and 'what does not work' for the government schemes. Schemes such as PMEGP and Schemes under National Rural Livelihood Mission.

Questioning the elected representatives:

Through the platform, it also engaged in local level dialogue with the elected representatives at Gram Panchayat. All monitoring and evaluation need not necessarily be presented at the highest level of bureaucracy. A local level representation and intervention can alter the implementation of a scheme; making it more contextualized. For example, in Jamgaon village in Aurangabad district, women SHG members who had challenge opening account under the PMJDY scheme, due to lack of cooperation from the Gram Panchayat office; the SHG members called gram Sabha and provided feedback on the same , ensuring their voices were heard and appropriate intervention effected.

Negotiating schemes with Implementing agencies:

Through the various government promoted livelihood loans, SHG provided feedback to the executive body to ensure smooth loan processing. Interventions and escalation based on evidence, assist in ensuring democratization and access to credit, a prerequisite for economic empowerment.

Overseeing the budget allocation and project execution:

MAVIM program enabled women to question the budget allocation as well as spending the budget for the categories it was meant to be. Organisation of health camps which include screening for anaemia and reproductive disorders were included in part of the Gram Panchayat actionable are monitored. With access to information of various government schemes for women such as Sanjay Gandhi Niradhar Anudhan Yogna (Scheme for widows) wherein widow below particular age are eligible to get monthly allowance from the State was accessible.

Learning from MAVIM experience -

Based on the experience of MAVIM, it is observed for P M&E to be successful there must be community involvement and ownership. This can be achieved by only institutional participatory development (not just PM&E) at grass root level. PM&E enables generation of location specific insights and information, PM&E processes can significantly improve policy execution by ensuring adaptive and agile resource management and participative decision making. By identifying barriers to participation, it provides a platform for the marginalised to voice their opinions. For the same it requires and administrative

will, and appropriate senior policy makers need to be involved to ensure adequate importance and focus. PM&E fills the void, rather than providing clarity about expectations of marginalised and poor people. Secondly, it requires governance which has to be viewed as a process of development and not a process of audit, and adequately supported in terms of not just financial resources but also training and capacity building. The ecosystem needs to be supported with adequate usage of technology.Thirdly, Information sharing, debating and action-oriented dialogue are hallmarks of PM&E processes, which contribute to openness and transparency. It leads to better promotion of openness and transparency and challenges the status quo. By enabling a mechanism of appropriate checks and balances, it ensures citizens can have an avenue to debate with local governments and the implementing agencies.

Lastly, collaboration via PM&E can help in empathy and open dialogue. It helps in decision making and provides a structured channel to voice opinions and views to appropriate stakeholders. Even from the citizen, realism dawns and expectations are aligned to the possibilities which the government can deliver in the time horizon under consideration. It enabled building of horizontal relationships with a collaborative shared analysis and agreement on options for change. It also promotes local governance and enhances the motivation of the local administrative staff.

Conclusion

MAVIM structure focused on building an institution, which is not program or scheme specific but is sustainable and scalable across various schemes. The structure enabled creating the space to share opinion and monitor actual progress by enabling participation of the most vulnerable and affected beneficiaries. The framework adopted enabled, people-centred instead of production oriented, mechanical development. Involving a grass-root organisation which was multi faced provided a cost effective, agile, and action-oriented PM&E. It enabled the capacity to do concurrent evaluation to enable appropriate course correction during implementation. It enabled community capacities enhancement, improved communication and enhanced trust among citizens, legislative bodies and administrative officers, constantly challenging the status quo. The governance and structure provided a platform for negotiation during scheme implementation. The grass root structure across the state, enabled flexibility, agility, and contextualisation of M&E to shape effective and sustainable programs.

MAVIM was successful in ensuring there is M&E in P (Participative process), rather than laying emphasis on more participation in existing / conventional M&E systems. This approach strengthened agility, learning, and provided focus required in execution, thereby enhancing impact of the interventions. Participatory Monitoring and evaluation are not just of inclusion, but of enabling 'Voices' and 'Spaces' at the decision-making table.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

FEMINIST VISIONS: AREA SABHAS AS DYNAMIC AGENTS IN URBAN TRANSFORMATION UNDER COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION LAWS

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical exploration of Area Sabhas in Mumbai as dynamic agents of urban transformation, examining their potential to foster inclusive governance under India's Community Participation Law. With urbanization intensifying socio-economic disparities in Mumbai, this study interrogates how feminist urbanism, coupled with participatory governance, can reshape urban spaces to better serve marginalized groups, especially women. The broad objective is to analyze how Area Sabhas, as platforms for community participation, empower women and other underrepresented groups in urban decision-making processes. The central question guiding this research is: How can feminist urbanism, in conjunction with participatory governance, amplify the voices of marginalized communities in urban governance? The study employs a qualitative, feminist ethnographic approach, focusing on in-depth interviews and observations of women representatives in Mumbai's urban slums between 2016-2021. Findings highlight both the potential and challenges of these community-driven spaces, demonstrating how Area Sabhas serve as key vehicles for "everyday feminism" in urban governance. However, obstacles such as bureaucratic barriers and gendered socio-political dynamics persist. Ultimately, this paper underscores the importance of integrating feminist perspectives into urban governance frameworks to create more inclusive, equitable cities, presenting Area Sabhas as critical components of participatory urbanism in India.

Keywords: **Area Sabhas, governance, decision making, feminist urbanism, participatory urbanism**

Paper received 11th November 2024, paper accepted, 20th November 2024

Background of the Study

India, with the second-largest urban system globally, has undergone rapid urbanization, resulting in approximately 36.6% of its population residing in urban areas. Maharashtra, the leading state, boasts the highest urban population in the country. While cities have become

engines of economic growth and employment, they also face significant socio-economic challenges. Urbanization has intensified inequality in resource distribution and widened income gaps, contributing to deteriorating living conditions for many urban dwellers. (ACIP 2021) According to the 2011 Census, approximately 25% of India's urban population lives in slums, where inadequate access to essential services and a lack of affordable housing are persistent issues. (ACIP 2021)

In response to these challenges, alternative urban development models that prioritize inclusivity have gained prominence. One such model is feminist urbanism, which advocates for urban spaces that cater to the diverse needs of women and marginalized groups. Feminist urbanism is a powerful critique of traditional urban planning approaches that often overlook gender-specific concerns and fail to address the vulnerabilities of underrepresented populations. Various regions, including Spain and Latin America, have implemented community-based, bottom-up approaches that highlight the significance of inclusivity for women, children, the elderly, and people from diverse racial, ethnic, gender, and economic backgrounds. (Sara & Valdivia 2015)

Additionally, at a global level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscores the interconnection between "Gender Equality" (SDG 5) and "Sustainable Cities and Communities" (SDG 11). This intersection has been codified in the New Urban Agenda by UN Habitat, which provides a blueprint for urban planning that promotes sustainable, inclusive urbanization. (UN Habitat 2016)

In the Indian context, the Community Participation Law and the establishment of Area Sabhas, mandated by the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, represent significant advancements in promoting participatory democracy. These legal frameworks have the potential to transform urban governance by encouraging community participation, especially among marginalized groups. However, questions remain regarding how effectively these mechanisms can empower women and marginalized communities in urban decision-making processes and whether their voices are adequately represented in governance structures.

Introduction

This paper examines two interconnected themes that are essential to the ongoing discourse on urban transformation. First, it explores how the theory and practice of feminist urbanism can enrich urban planning and governance by emphasizing the diverse needs and

experiences of women and marginalized communities. Feminist urbanism challenges traditional paradigms of urban development by promoting inclusivity and addressing the safety, accessibility, and well-being of all citizens. One of the most well-documented examples of feminist urbanism in practice is the Catalan Neighbourhood Law of 2004, which incorporated gender considerations into urban planning and service delivery across the Barcelona metropolitan area, demonstrating how feminist perspectives can shape inclusive and responsive urban environments. (World Bank 2006)

Second, this paper explores how India's Community Participation Law and the formation of Area Sabhas, as mandated by the 74th Amendment Act, can serve as critical mechanisms for enhancing inclusivity in urban governance. Area Sabhas offer a platform for community participation in local governance, enabling women and marginalized communities to influence decision-making processes.

The research seeks to answer key questions: How can feminist urbanism, in conjunction with participatory governance mechanisms like Area Sabhas, amplify the voices of women and marginalized groups in urban governance? What obstacles do these groups face in participating in decision-making processes, and how can their lived experiences inform efforts to create more inclusive and equitable urban spaces?

To explore these questions, the study employs a qualitative research approach rooted in feminist methodologies and urban ethnography. This approach centers on the lived experiences of women representatives from Area Sabhas in Mumbai, as well as the insights of social activists from various municipal wards of Mumbai.1 The study focuses on experiences and observation of community participation in urban slums during 2016 to 2017 and 2020 to 2021. The paper aims at analysing how these experiences reflect the broader themes of feminist urbanism and participatory democracy in action.

The Oretical Framwork: Feminist Perspectives on Urban Transformation

This study is built upon two key theoretical foundations: the global discourse on feminist urbanism and the critical role of participatory governance in shaping inclusive urban spaces. These concepts are deeply embedded in the historical trajectory of women's movements in India, which have long advocated for gender-sensitive policies and equitable access to urban resources. (Sen 1990) A significant focus of this paper is to highlight the growing

agency of marginalized communities, including women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, who are now at the forefront of urban movements. Unlike earlier movements often led by educated, urban women, today's initiatives reflect a broader, more inclusive base of participation and leadership within city spaces.

Feminist urbanism offers a robust framework for rethinking how cities are designed and managed, addressing the unique needs of women and marginalized groups. Traditional urban planning often overlooks the gendered dimensions of urban life, focusing primarily on economic efficiency while neglecting issues such as safety, accessibility, and equitable distribution of resources. Feminist urbanism seeks to rectify these omissions by advocating for cities that reflect the lived experiences of all citizens, particularly those who have historically been excluded from decision-making processes.

Alongside feminist urbanism, the study engages with the concept of participatory governance, which emphasizes active citizen involvement in governance processes. Participatory governance differs from decentralization in that it involves not just the redistribution of power across different levels of government but also the creation of spaces where citizens can directly engage in decision-making. (Cornwall & Gaventa 2001) Within this context, two types of spaces emerge: invited spaces, where the state actively encourages participation, and claimed spaces, where citizens assert their rights to influence governance. (De Wit et al 2008)

The success of participatory governance relies on creating equal opportunities for citizens to engage meaningfully. This requires clear delegation of powers, financial autonomy, and an inclusive process that involves citizens at every stage of policy-making-formulation, passage, and implementation. (Fung & Wright 2001) By integrating feminist urbanism and participatory governance, this paper seeks to explore how these theoretical perspectives can inform the transformation of urban spaces into truly inclusive, equitable environments.

Methodological Framework

This research study adopts a qualitative approach that draws on feminist methodologies and urban ethnography. The primary focus is on the lived experiences of representatives from Area Sabhas in Mumbai (more particularly from marginalized locations, majority of respondents were women), as well as the insights of social activists involved in various

wards of the Mumbai city. By examining the role of these women in urban governance, the study aims to uncover the challenges they face and the strategies they employ to influence decision-making processes. Urban ethnography is essential in this study because it allows us to see how women and other marginalized communities in Area Sabhas in Mumbai find ways to work within and reshape city governance.

The primary data involves in-depth interviews and ethnographic observations during 2016 to 2017 and 2020 to 2021. These methods were chosen to capture the complexities of community participation and the socio-political dynamics of Mumbai's urban slums. By prioritizing the voices of marginalized groups, the research offers a nuanced understanding of how gender, class, and locality intersect to shape urban transformation.

The application of feminist methodologies ensures that the research remains grounded in the experiences of women and marginalized communities. These methodologies challenge conventional power dynamics in research, ensuring that participants are not just subjects of study but active contributors to the knowledge production process. In doing so, this study highlights the importance of centering marginalized voices in discussions about urban governance and transformation.

Unveiling Area Sabhas: Dynamic Agents of Change Under Community Participation Law (CPL)

The Area Sabha, a neighborhood-level consultative body composed of all registered voters in a local area, symbolizes the potential for community-driven governance. Introduced under India's Community Participation Law (CPL), Area Sabhas amplify the voices of everyday citizens, especially those historically marginalized in decision-making processes. This model shifts power back to communities, creating inclusive spaces where local concerns are addressed, enabling residents to influence urban policies that shape their lives.

India's journey toward more democratic urban governance gained momentum in the 1960s with early planning initiatives, notably the Third Plan (1961-1966). (Sharma 2009) This plan recognized the critical need for effective urban governance to address the challenges posed by rapid urbanization and set the stage for more participatory approaches. Influenced by the Charles Correa Commission's 1988 report, the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) in 1992 emerged as a significant turning point, granting legal recognition to Urban

Local Bodies (ULBs) as democratic institutions accountable to their residents. This amendment envisioned decentralized and inclusive governance, emphasizing citizen participation and institutional accountability. However, realizing this vision proved slow, and genuine community involvement remained limited for years.

The situation began to shift dramatically with the introduction of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM) in 2005. This initiative mandated that cities actively engage their citizens to qualify for development funding, reinforcing the importance of community participation. Under JNNURM, the Area Sabha model became central, providing communities with an avenue to participate in local planning, articulate their needs, and influence development priorities directly.

Area Sabhas, along with their supporting mechanisms, aim to foster transparent and responsive governance structures. They bridge the gap between citizens and municipal authorities, allowing local voices to contribute meaningfully to urban development. Despite this potential, the success of Area Sabhas varies widely across states. While Kerala has demonstrated how participatory governance can thrive, many regions still struggle to create the supportive frameworks necessary for these reforms to take root, limiting the impact of the 74th Amendment.

The journey toward effective community-led governance in Mumbai has also been driven by grassroots efforts like those of Sadbhavna Sangh (SS), under the leadership of Gandhian humanist Kishan Goradia2. Inspired by Gandhian principles of Swaraj (self-rule) and Sarvodaya (welfare for all), SS advocated for participatory democracy, ensuring that marginalized voices are central to urban governance. (Parathara 2017) Notably, SS has been the only organization which worked collectively at the grassroots level to build understanding about the important role of community leadership and participatory governance as basic necessity for urban self-governance and development (Nagar Swaraj) in a sustained manner. Since 2009, energized by legislative amendments designed to establish Area Sabhas in Maharashtra and inspired by the Central Government's 2007 Model Nagar Raj Bill, SS has been dedicated to the establishment of Area Sabha. By mobilizing residents, raising awareness, and collaborating with other organizations, SS champions the Area Sabha as a means to achieve collective ownership of governance. SS is actively working in the area concerning peoples' leadership in cities in 28 districts of 9 Mahanagarpalika area of Mumbai, 9 districts of Maharashtra and 5 cities of Gujarat.

The CPL and Area Sabhas represent a significant step toward a more inclusive urban future. (Singh 2021) These frameworks empower underrepresented communities, particularly women and marginalized groups, by providing real opportunities to participate in shaping their cities. Thus, the Area Sabha is not merely a consultative body; it is a transformative force promoting shared responsibility, transparency, and active citizenship in India's rapidly urbanizing landscape. By embodying the principles of Swaraj and Sarvodaya, Area Sabhas contribute to a vision of governance where the welfare of all is prioritized, paving the way for a more equitable urban society. (Kothari 1960) This narrative of change not only aligns with historical movements for self-governance but also reflects the ongoing struggle for equitable urban development in contemporary India.

Voices from the Ground : Insights from Area Sabha Representatives

The Area Sabhas in Mumbai have emerged as powerful platforms for community engagement and empowerment, particularly for marginalized voices. The evolution of these grassroots bodies mirrors the transformative journeys of representatives who actively shape local governance and contribute to urban resilience. Through their work, these members highlight the potential of Area Sabhas as essential intermediaries for addressing community needs.

Driving Local Change: Grassroots Leadership

Through direct conversations with Area Sabha representatives, a remarkable picture of grassroots leadership unfolds-one where ordinary citizens take on extraordinary roles in their communities, each overcoming unique challenges to make a tangible impact. These stories reveal the profound ways in which involvement in neighborhood committees has not only empowered these members but also amplified their voices in local governance.

Subrabi Khan, a Muslim woman with a 7th-grade education, shared how she initially felt invisible in her open ward. In our talks, she recounted how being part of the committee helped her move from being unheard to being a respected advocate for essential services like water pipelines and drainage. Although her campaign for municipal office fell short, Subrabi expressed how the experience emboldened her and her community, helping them see the power of collective action.

Shamim Bano, who rallied her community with the slogan, "Light up, chase away the rats," opened up about her commitment to transparency. In our exchange, she reflected on the neighborhood committee's role as a bridge to the municipality, allowing her to push for better lighting and sanitation services. Shamim emphasized that through the committee, she found a platform to champion community-driven governance, which instilled a new confidence in her leadership.

Dastagir Chaudhary, a 12th-grade graduate and store owner, spoke passionately about his frustrations with the local councilor's inaction. He described how his work in the committee to improve sanitation, drainage, and school traffic safety inspired others around him to demand change. Dastagir explained how his role in organizing neighbors not only addressed urgent community needs but also brought him a sense of purpose and capability he hadn't known before.

Jamil Ahmed, a madrasa-educated business owner, shared his journey with the RTI Act to ensure budget transparency for local projects. Our conversation revealed his pride in transforming the committee into a "parallel government" for the community, helping residents hold officials accountable. Jamil found that this involvement empowered him to champion transparency in ways he hadn't thought possible, building trust and unity within his neighborhood.

Munni Jaiswal, despite lacking formal education, recounted how being part of the committee enabled her to influence critical projects like toilet construction. In our discussions, she highlighted the committee's role in giving her an official identity and the confidence to interact with officials-something she never imagined. This newfound empowerment has sparked her aspiration to pursue a future councilor role, proving how grassroots governance can open doors for those previously marginalized.

These interactions reveal more than just individual achievements; they illustrate how Area Sabha membership can be profoundly transformative. By actively engaging in community issues, each member has discovered their own agency, translating their experiences into a collective force for change. Through these dialogues, it becomes clear that neighborhood committees do more than address local problems-they empower citizens to reimagine and shape their communities, one small step at a time. By bridging the gap between citizens and government, these committees are fostering a new model of participatory leadership that is reshaping communities and building resilience in the face of bureaucratic challenges.

Transformative Journeys in Local Governance

The story of Sultana Shaikh Akbar further exemplifies the transformative impact of Area Sabhas in responding to community needs. A resident of Agarwal Wadi, Sultana quickly mobilized resources for an ailing neighbor, coordinating with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) to arrange for hospital care. During the pandemic, she took it upon herself to oversee door-to-door ration distribution, advocating for families who lacked ration cards to receive essential supplies. Her journey began in an Area Sabha meeting, where she first learned how to navigate government processes, igniting a passion for community service and advocacy that has since empowered her to represent her neighbors more effectively. Her experiences reflect a broader narrative of the Area Sabha's journey since its inception. (Varshney 2020) Varsha Vidya Vilas from Sadbhavna Sangh asserts, "Area Sabhas are the fourth tier of governance. We need them to deliver basic rights to people." Despite facing opposition from local corporators who felt their power would be threatened, Varsha emphasizes the essential role of Area Sabhas in promoting citizen participation and accountability.

This empowerment is echoed across the community, where representatives like Yasin Khan have seen how Area Sabhas act as catalysts for both awareness and action. "When Sadbhavna Sangh started to formalize Area Sabhas, they received phenomenal support from citizens. People want basic facilities: cleanliness, sanitation, timely water, and Area Sabhas showed them they could learn how to use the law to access these services." Supported by groups like Sadbhavna Sangh, the Area Sabha of Agarwal Wadi, which consists of 16 members-twelve men and four women, has built strong relationships with local officials, yielding visible improvements in cleanliness, waste management, and public health resources.

Together, these narratives illustrate the profound and positive transformations happening through Area Sabha initiatives. As these community leaders become well-versed in government structures, they not only secure necessary resources but also reinforce the importance of citizen engagement in governance. Area Sabhas have proven to be more than local advocacy bodies-they are the heart of community resilience, inspiring members to take charge and collectively reimagine their neighborhoods, often against all odds.

Reaching Those in Need: Area Sabha Community Support

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the vital role of Area Sabha members in crisis management and community care. Recognizing urgent needs, they organized themselves to provide essential supplies and support to their most vulnerable neighbors. By forming smaller groups to focus on health, education, sanitation, and food distribution, Area Sabha members maximized their impact.

For example, Sultana Shaikh Akbar worked with the Ration Office to secure food supplies, while other members coordinated COVID-19 safety protocols with the BMC. This collaboration ensured that resources like ration kits, hot meals, and sanitary supplies reached thousands of families and individuals safely and efficiently. Their efforts not only met immediate needs but also highlighted the resilience of community-led initiatives. Key impacts include substantial outcomes across various aspects of daily provisioning and essential supplies, reaching multiple wards of Mumbai (e.g., A, F/N, M/E, G/S, N, F/S, T, R, G/N, K) as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1: Area Sabha: Community Outreach Outcome

Activity	Beneficiaries
Ration Kits	9,997 families
Khichdi Packets	11,734 people
Glucose Biscuits	20,000 children
Energy Drink Powder	10,000 people
Sanitary Napkins	25,000 youth
Masks	800 workers
Iftar Family Kit	50 families
Fruits	500 homeless people
Household Items	492 homeless people
Safety Kits	300 workers
Face Shields	100 workers
Alcohol Problem Solving Sessions	185 citizens
Medicines	40 families
Financial Aid (Rs 3000)	25 artists

Source: Sadbhavana Sangh Report. 2020-2021 (Vilas & Kshirsagar 2021)

Notably, in Dharavi, Area Sabha representative Ganesh Sonwane played a frontline role by coordinating hospital beds and medical resources, securing critical care for COVID-positive patients across Mumbai. His hands-on support-organizing patient transport, testing, and admissions-illustrated the Area Sabha's essential role in urban crisis management. Such efforts reinforced the importance of local governance in addressing not only day-to-day community needs but also life-saving emergency care. His efforts enabled timely access to critical care at institutions like Seven Hills Hospital (Andheri East), JJ Hospital (Byculla), Hinduja Hospital (Mahim), Sion Hospital, KEM Hospital (Parel), NSC (Worli), Bandra-Kurla Complex (Bandra), and Nayar Hospital (Mumbai Central).

Area Sabha's Multi-Stakeholder Collaborations for Community Support

In response to pressing community needs, Area Sabhas forged strategic partnerships with government departments, NGOs, and local organizations, creating a robust support network that strengthened their role in community governance. These collaborations not only improved the delivery of essential services but also expanded the Area Sabha's reach and impact. Key partnerships included contributions from:

(a) **Government Departments:** Public Distribution System (PDS), Municipal Corporation, Police Services, Health Department, Traffic Police, Social Development Authority, Food and Medicine Department.

(b) **Community Leaders and Representatives:** Several key representatives-social workers, corporators, business owners, and local journalists-played instrumental roles in coordinating and facilitating relief efforts.

(c) **Supporting Organizations:** Partnerships with local and regional organizations amplified the outreach, including: a) Institutional Support: Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Nirmala Niketan, Rajiv Gandhi Contemporary Studies College, Centre for Promoting Democracy, SNDT Women's University; b) NGOs and Foundations: Awaaz Foundation, Helping Hand Foundation, Mumbai Ration Kruti Samiti, Sankalp Organization, Jeevandhara Foundation, Baakar Foundation, and more, c) Community-Based Organizations: Save Home, Build Home; Jamate Islame Hind; Savitri Mahila Mandal; Birsa Munda Adivasi Organization; Rashtriya Seva Dal; and others.

The collaboration between Area Sabha members, community leaders, and local representatives was instrumental in managing the challenges posed by the pandemic. Over 50 individuals, including corporators, businesspeople, social workers, and journalists, leveraged their expertise and local knowledge to support neighborhoods in need. As Yasin Khan explains, "Area Sabhas bring governance down to the street level." He highlights how the members' close connections within their neighborhoods allow them to act as essential links between residents and authorities. For instance, they can alert the administration to address recurring issues like monsoon flooding of specific gutters, ensuring that action is taken where it's needed most.

The evolution of Area Sabhas in Mumbai demonstrates the expanding scope of these local governance bodies. While initially focused on sanitation and water supply, their initiatives now include education and employment support. "We've begun conducting career camps for students," Yasin notes. Moreover, women in the community have formed self-help groups, securing government funding to launch small businesses such as vegetable sales and mask production during the pandemic.

As a researcher engaging with these grassroots leaders, I'm moved by their unwavering commitment despite bureaucratic challenges. These voices from the ground are shaping a new vision of governance rooted in collaboration, accountability, and service. The experiences of Subrabi Khan, Shamim Bano, Dastagir Chaudhary, Jamil Ahmed, Munni Jaiswal, Sultana Shaikh, and Yasin show how Area Sabhas are transforming ordinary citizens into active agents of change, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering resilience within communities. Together, they reflect the collective power of participatory urban governance, with Area Sabhas emerging as vital pillars of inclusive and transformative local leadership across Mumbai.

Towards a Feminist Urban Future

This paper highlights the transformative potential of grassroots leadership within Mumbai's Area Sabhas, using feminist frameworks that center on collective agency, intersectionality, and the redistribution of power. Through the lived experiences of representatives like Subrabi Khan and Sultana Shaikh, the study reveals how these local governance structures, while operating within a patriarchal urban landscape, become powerful sites for resistance and empowerment. The stories of these women exemplify "everyday feminism"-the daily acts of courage, negotiation, and resilience that challenge traditional power dynamics and foster collective action.

Methodologically, the paper draws on narrative inquiry to foreground the voices of marginalized individuals, illustrating how their lived experiences disrupt hierarchical power structures. The Area Sabhas, functioning as community-driven spaces, advocate for more inclusive, accountable governance. They offer a concrete example of participatory action research, where local leadership redefines governance beyond the state's neglect. Yet, these grassroots efforts are not without their challenges: bureaucratic barriers, gendered expectations, and systemic exclusion often limit their reach and impact, forcing leaders to continuously navigate and overcome these obstacles.

Mumbai, with its complex urban realities, plays a pivotal role in the emergence and evolution of Area Sabhas. These community-driven spaces address immediate local needs while reimagining urban governance by empowering citizens to reclaim their rights and reshape their communities. Despite the many barriers faced, including resistance from local authorities and limited resources, these grassroots leaders persist in transforming their neighborhoods. Their work embodies a vision of feminist urban futures-rooted in justice, care, and collective well-being-that can emerge from the very streets and communities of the city.

This study affirms that a feminist urban future is not a distant ideal but a tangible reality built by everyday acts of resistance and care. The Area Sabhas in Mumbai, despite their challenges, offer a powerful model for participatory governance that can serve as a blueprint for cities across the globe.

Endnotes

1 I express deep appreciation to Ms. Varsha Vidya Vilas, social activist and Deputy Head, Mumbai Citizen Forum, whose insights and advocacy have profoundly enriched this work. Our long-standing professional connection in the field of urban politics-rooted in my commitment to fostering women's leadership and her focus on participatory urban governance-has been invaluable. Her dedication to advancing the Nagar Raj Bill since 2009 and her role as a champion of community-driven governance continue to inspire our shared vision for inclusive and empowered urban communities.

2 My understanding of Kishanji's ideological and methodological views is deeply informed by my personal interaction with him during an extensive video interview in 2016-2017. In our conversation, he openly reflected on his journey, philosophical influences, societal concerns, and strategies for social transformation, providing invaluable insights into his unique approach and vision.

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Research Horizons: Peer–Reviewed Journal
VOL. 14 DECEMBER 2024 **ISSN 2229–385X**

CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES: WATER SCARCITY AND GENDERED RESPONSIBILITIES AMONG LIANGMAI WOMEN

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Abstract

Water scarcity in hill forest areas is common most of the time, regardless of heavy rain, due to a lack of proper water management systems in the region, and the dryness of winter is harsher and colder during the winter season, which has often resulted in unique gender responsibilities for the people living in the forest areas. Liangmai, a tribal society in Manipur's hilly region, practices a patriarchal system in social administrative society, which has shaped women in the family or society to take on responsibilities in social gender expected roles in the society. Liangmai women play an important role in the family, particularly in domestic chores and family management. Women are required to perform certain gender responsibilities in the home. Women occupy key roles and are required to collect and manage water resources, both of which have cultural and environmental implications. This article examines how water scarcity in Liangmai tribal society intersects with gender responsibilities by examining the socio-cultural expectations placed on women, as well as the impact of environmental challenges on the daily lives of Liangmai tribal women. This article delves into the experiences and obligations of a Liangmai woman who has taken on family responsibilities through a qualitative personal interview. Talking about how their daily lives have been hampered and burdened by their roles in collecting water in forested areas, which are not even seen as jobs but rather as responsibilities for women. Through analysis, these articles highlight the intersection of the larger implications of gender roles that are expected in Liangmai culture and highlight the broader gender equity in the management of water resources in Liangmai society.

Keywords: **Liangmai women, Gender roles, water scarcity, culture.**

Paper Received - 14th October 2024 Paper Accepted 28th October 2024

Introduction

Water scarcity is a global issue affecting both rural and urban populations. Despite being a prevalent issue, the issues associated with it may be addressed from two distinct perspectives. Within urban society, efficient governance of social administration and governmental action may significantly mitigate water shortage in urban regions, where gender roles are less defined concerning water management. Nonetheless, it is erroneous to assert that the responsibilities associated with water management eradicate gender roles in urban settings. Ultimately, women often bear the major responsibility for home responsibilities, including water management and care, even whether the water management system is well maintained or provided by the government. Conversely, water management in rural regions significantly differs from that in metropolitan areas. In rural and indigenous communities, water supplies are often constrained by inadequate infrastructure and underdevelopment. Consequently, the collection and management of water is mostly the responsibility of women in these communities. The cultural and sociological division of work contributes to heightened gender disparity in society. In communities, they have the significant but burdensome role of providing water for domestic consumption. They must awaken before daybreak to traverse to natural ponds since they get water from that source. This duty is typically seen as a role exclusively for women. Although it requires significant time and energy, this is not considered labour, despite its restriction on opportunities for school, employment, or other social engagements.

In tribal communities, role divisions are clearly defined, as exemplified by the Liangmai, where specific expectations are assigned to each gender. In the Liangmai community, females are primarily responsible for domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and water collection, while males engage in agricultural activities, hunting, and administrative duties. The roles are interconnected with conventional functions and collective practices and beliefs that have been influenced by thousands of years of human interaction with the natural environment. The population primarily resides in the mountainous Tamenglong District of Manipur and some are located in rural villages of Nagaland. Historically, the warfare and headhunting practices of the Liangmai necessitated their settlement in mountainous regions, providing them with a strategic advantage for self-defence against adversaries. The region remains rugged, often experiencing water scarcity during dry seasons. Historically, ponds and streams have served as the primary water sources for Liangmai villages due to the

considerable distance of rivers. The prevalent deforestation in the Liangmai area has, over time, combined with climate change to exacerbate the water scarcity observed in recent years In Liangmai custom, women serve as the primary water carriers and oversee the household's internal water supply. The responsibility to manage home water supplies was onerous, particularly since procuring water required traversing extensive distances over uneven and sometimes hazardous landscapes, especially during the winter months when sources generally diminished. The physical mechanism of the arduous work performed by women in society is remarkable; nonetheless, it is considered a component of the anticipated gender roles within the community. This dissertation examines the obstacles faced by women in the Liangmai culture, notably with the demands of their community and the maintenance of their personal lives, especially those pertaining to gender roles. This article examines environmental exploitation in both rural and urban regions, exacerbating climatic issues and increasing the load on women's work, thus restricting mobility and prospects for empowerment. This research examines and adds to traditional gender roles concerning boundaries, environment, and growth within the community, highlighting the need for a gender-sensitive approach to water management in the Liangmai community. In tribal societies, such as the Liangmai, distinct roles are evident, with specific expectations assigned to each gender. Liangmai women are tasked with household responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, and water collection, whilst males are involved in agriculture, hunting, and other administrative roles. These professions are linked to conventional activities and communal attitudes and practices that have evolved throughout the millennia of human interaction with nature. It mostly resides in the Tamenglong District of Manipur; however, some members of the tribal tribe inhabit rural communities in Nagaland. Historically, the Liangmai were martial head-hunters, necessitating their habitation in the highlands, where they had strategic advantages for self-defence against adversaries. This explains why the terrain remains hilly and experiences thirst during arid seasons. Historically, rivers were inaccessible to the Liangmai, since they were far from their habitats; hence, ponds and streams were the only water supplies for Liangmai communities. Deforestation in the Liangmai area has, over time, exacerbated the current drought, compounded by climate change

Review of Literatures

A significant amount of scholarly attention has focused on the issue of water scarcity and its intersection with gender roles in rural communities: the socio-environmental challenges

faced by women in resource-scarce areas. In addition to posing an environmental threat, water scarcity also presents a social justice challenge, disproportionately affecting women due to their responsibility for managing the household water supply system (Parikh, 2020; Ahlers & Zwarteveen, 2009).

Gendered Responsibilities in Water Management

Research has revealed that gender roles informally compel women to collect and manage water in the house, especially in rural and indigenous communities (Crow & Sultana, 2002; Falkenmark, 2019). Despite the physical strain and time-consuming nature of this role, it is never considered a legitimately laborious domestic obligation (Goh, 2021). Harris (2018) attempts to highlight the significant impact such hidden labour has on women's economic opportunities, health, and social status within their communities. Similar to this, Parikh's research on gendered water responsibilities highlights how these responsibilities impact educational opportunities, often preventing young girls from attending school to meet household water needs. This, in turn, creates a strong barrier between the genders in terms of education and employment.

Environmental and Social Impacts of Water Scarcity

Environmental studies also emphasize the significant proximity of environmental degradation to women's social status in the village environment. The burden on women increases when water resources become scarce due to climate change, deforestation, and poor infrastructure (Rao, 2017). According to a study by Singh et al. (2021), women living in water-scarce areas must travel a longer and more exhausting distance to fetch water. Further, Shiva (1988) contends that this burden exacerbates physical risks to health, especially if women carry heavy loads for considerable distances. Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen's (1998) studies in South Asia illustrate how water management continues to be a gendered field, with women expected to lead but with limited authority over local water resource decisions.

Governance and Infrastructure Gaps in Water Management

Many recurring themes throughout the literature suggest government efforts to address the issue of water scarcity among rural communities. Kapoor looks at government-led water schemes in rural India and says that improper maintenance and absence of local participation result in ineffective infrastructure. The report underscores the reality that while several

government programs aim to increase the supply of clean and potable water, they often face bureaucratic delays and resource deficiencies (Kapoor, 2019). Studies by Prakash and Singh, 2021, indicate that most underdeveloped infrastructures failed to meet population requirements, leaving the villagers in Liangmai and other similar regions as victims of seasonal drought.

Research Methodology

This research utilized an exploratory qualitative methodology to explore the impact of water shortage on gender roles within society and how cultural factors have positioned women as the primary managers of water resources in the home. The study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their feelings and perspectives without constraints. The research aimed to understand how the implications of this issue can be addressed from a personal viewpoint while following structured questions.

The study used a purposive sample technique, focusing on one person from the Tamei region in Manipur, representing the greater Liangmai community, where water shortage is a significant concern. A total of 30 participants, including 20 women and 10 males, were included to examine the gendered effects of water shortage that have compounded the challenges faced by women in their lives. The participation of male participants provided a comparative examination of gender perspectives and elucidated how men view and participate in water-related issues in the community.

The main data-gathering strategy involved conducting in-depth, semi-structured interviews in the native Liangmai dialect with 30 participants. The interviews were videotaped, notes collected, and the participants' interviews were transcribed and reviewed multiple times. Key aspects and phrases related to water scarcity and gender roles were identified and coded, which were then grouped into broader themes to accurately capture the participants' perspectives and explain how water scarcity influences gender roles in Liangmai society.

Research Objectives

This research aims to explore the multifaceted impact of water scarcity on the lives of women in the Liang Mai society, focusing on how gendered responsibilities have shaped roles in the community. Through qualitative interviews, this study delves into the cultural norms, environmental changes, and social expectations that shape traditional gender roles in Liangmai society, with a particular focus on the family's water management responsibilities.

Research Objectives

1. This study aims to explore the impact of water scarcity and family water management on gender roles in the Liangmai society.
2. To investigate the physical and emotional impact of water collection on women in times of water scarcity.
3. Understanding the societal norms and cultural expectations that influence women's roles in family water management is crucial.
4. To analyse how the environmental changes have exercised water scarcity and how these factors have disproportionately added burden to the women in the Liangmai communities
5. To investigate the involvement of women in community decision-making concerning the creation of a water program.

The Problem of water scarcity in the Liangmai region

Water scarcity in the Liangmai region, like Tamei, stems from both natural and infrastructure challenges. People residing in the hills region encounter inherent challenges when it comes to obtaining reliable water resources for household management. The steep terrain limits access to natural water sources such as streams, rivers, and rainwater. However, this limited access also dried up in the dry season, exacerbating the water crisis. Even when water is present during the monsoon season, the people's community faces a water shortage due to a lack of awareness and knowledge about how to store or reservoir it. The Liangmai settlement's remote hillside location has hindered the development of water supply infrastructure. The Liangmai region has faced water scarcity and water management issues for a long time, dating back to the moral era. Many interviewees have recounted the difficulty of fetching water early in the morning, starting as early as 2 am, even in those earlier days. Consequently, the current state of water scarcity remains unresolved. Several theories can be used to look at the lack of water in the Liangmai region. These include the idea of political ecology, which looks at how unequal power affects environmental management and resource distribution from the government Robbins (2002), as well as the problems caused by the environment's rapid degradation, a lack of infrastructure, and the government's failure

to address the community's problems. This is consistent with the situation in the Liangmai community, where the government has implemented programs such as the Hill Area Development Program, yet their effectiveness has been undermined by inadequate infrastructure and maintenance. The interview reveals that all participants have access to government-provided facilities, but these projects have not been properly completed. Furthermore, the quality of work to ensure the connection of water from distant rivers runs smoothly has not been completed. In many rural areas and indigenous communities, women are the ones who bear the brunt of domestic water collection for the family, whether it be young or adult women. It has been shaped as a work of women culturally. This aligns with the feminist argument that environmental degradation worsens the socio-economic position of women in society, especially due to their roles in managing natural resources for domestic purposes (Agarwal, 1992).

Government schemes such as rural water supply projects have been sanctioned by the government, like under the Hills area development programs for water supply schemes worth 7.9 crore rupees, specifically sections for the Tamei sub-division. However, the implementation of this kind of project has not reached the full efforts of the government in the hilly region, especially in the region like Tamei, which is in very remote areas and most of the state. One major issue is the difficulty in accessing and maintaining infrastructure in such areas. The constant maintenance of reservoirs, pipelines, and water resource production sites necessitates careful monitoring, particularly during the rainy and winter seasons following project completion. This often leads to the project's stagnation or collapse. The (Press Information Bureau (PIB) 2022). reports that despite the approval of a 7.9 crores water supply scheme near the Tamei sub-division, the ongoing water scarcity persists and intensifies during the dry season. This indicates that the issue is not solely due to a lack of infrastructure and awareness about water reservoirs, but also to a lack of effective governance and authority in project execution.

Gender roles and cultural norms and its impact on the lives of women

The Liangmai community's gender division of responsibilities and social norms regarding water management in the family has a significant impact on women's lives, limiting their opportunities. Water fetching responsibilities are regarded as the primary role of women, reflecting deeply rooted social norms that constrain women's roles within the household.

Drawing from the interview conducted in Tamei, we learn that the social expectation deeply embodies water fetching or being responsible for water management, which is culturally considered a woman's role, and that women are expected to be more oriented towards domestic chores. Women are expected to perform these domestic-related tasks often without acknowledgement or support from men, while men's involvement with the domestic is very limited, with only a few young boys occasionally participating. Bina Agarwal argues that social perception often naturalizes gendered labour, rendering it invisible (Agarwal 1992). This gender division of labour in the Liangmai community placed a significant burden on the women shaping their lives, limiting their access to education and opportunities for personal development. Social norms of gender roles, which assign domestic roles to women and public and economic roles to men, make it difficult for women to gain autonomy, participate fully in community life, and spend more time for themselves (Agarwal 1997).

In the Liangmai society, gathering water is viewed as a "natural" duty for women, rather than recognised as labour and work. The Liangmai society has ignored the concept of "invisible labour," perceiving it as part of a cultural practice where men tend to ignore and undervalue unpaid labour such as water collection, food preparation, caregiving, and domestic work, all of which are performed within the private sphere (Folbre, 2006). Many interviewees expressed that traditional gender norms, which view domestic work as an inherently female job, extend to the burden of water collection and other household chores. Women's statements, such as "Water collecting/fetching water is not even counted as a job," clearly illustrate this division of roles between genders, reinforcing a strong patriarchal social structure. The community's severe water shortage, particularly during the dry season, necessitates women waking up as early as 2 am to collect water. This requires a minimum walking distance of 10 to 20 minutes, depending on the house's proximity to the community water tank or reservoirs. According to some interviewees, women usually spend up to 2 to 3 hours in the morning fetching the water from the pond, often making multiple trips to require for the day. The labour of water collection does not only require or demand only physical efforts but also consumes time that could also be devoted to education or personal development. The task of collecting water, also known as fetching water, requires a significant amount of physical strength and significantly impacts women's health. Especially during the harsh winter season in the region, waking up at 2 am to fetch water from a distant pond leaves a significant stain on their bodies, leading to exhaustion and potential chronic issues.

The interview reveals that they can only complete "four to five trips from 2 am to 6 am" before they need to start cooking. The experience of the women in Liangmai is consistent with research, which suggests that women in water-scarce regions experience musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, and reproductive health issues as a result of prolonged and physically taxing water collection routines (Geere et al., 2018). Such an impact on women's bodies, stemming from domestic responsibilities to serve the entire family, not only diminishes their quality of life but also reduces their capacity and ability to participate in economic and social activities. According to feminist perspectives, environmental degradation and resource scarcity often disproportionately impact women's well-being due to their natural resource responsibilities in household management (Shiva, 1980).

Interviewees who enrolled in school highlighted that women have been faced with time-intensive tasks that compete with their educational opportunities. During the interview, a participant expressed that they rarely have time to study or even consider it as an option, particularly during the dry season when they are constantly engaged in domestic responsibilities both morning and evening. This reveals how gendered labour is not only limiting educational opportunities but also perpetuating intergenerational cycles within the family itself. In education, morning and evening hours are often critical for students to study; however, many women who are enrolled in school are unable to dedicate their time to academic duties due to being responsible for domestic work and adding the extra burden due to the scarcity of water, which consumes lots of time. Herz & Sperling (2024) emphasize that with the excessive burden on women, they are most likely to fall behind in academic performance, leading to higher chances of dropping out of school and reduced educational outcomes. Participants in the interview recall a time when they didn't even consider returning home from school after school hours. Instead, they assumed that domestic work and fetching water were their primary responsibilities. They never questioned this, viewing it as their job. Some participants also shared their experiences, expressing that they sometimes view school as less important than their domestic responsibilities. They have always been burdened with multiple tasks. However, cultural norms shape these domestic responsibilities, which are inherently believed to be embodied by women and are not even questioned in the family or society.

Cultural beliefs and social norms deeply rooted in Laingmai society dictate women's roles in the domestic sphere and water collection, while traditional gender roles further

reinforce men's roles and activities beyond the domestic sphere. The interview reveals that men typically participate in jobs that are more physically demanding and male-focused, as dictated by societal norms. However, they tend to overlook roles in the domestic sphere or water fetching, despite witnessing women juggling both domestic and external activities, such as farming and agriculture. This aligns with the gender theory of Eggly & Wood (2012), which posits that social norms assign specific roles to each gender in society based on biological and social differences. This creates rigid labour norms and division of labour even in the home, as men are not expected to share domestic work. This reinforced women's subordination in society, causing them to limit their autonomy by taking on excessive domestic responsibilities, while men enjoyed complete freedom to engage in economic and leisure activities within the community. The Liangmai community's normative structure of gender roles intersects with Chant's (2008) concept of "gendered spaces," which confines women to household and domestic space while men occupy public and economic space. The confinement of women's space to domestic responsibilities has hindered their participation in community activities and leadership roles within society. The participants' interviews confirm that men, or those involved in government schemes that develop and set the location or requirements of infrastructure, always make decisions related to community water crises or meetings aimed at eradicating water scarcity. These men, who have never been involved in or tasked with fetching water in their lives, consistently make these decisions. Addressing this gendered burden and water scarcity problem requires both structural and social intervention. One potential solution to these issues is to implement community water management systems that include women in the decision-making process. Researchers like Einzen Dick & Zwarteveen (1980) suggested that when women are involved in resource management, they bring valuable knowledge with experience and perspective that leads to more sustainable outcomes.

Conclusion

The issue of water scarcity and its gender implications present a multi-layered challenge that intersects with cultural norms, social expectations, environmental constraints, geographical location, inadequate infrastructure and failed governance at both the local and state levels. In the Liangmai community, women primarily bear the burden of collecting water, a physically demanding and time-intensive task that is largely unrecognized as labour or a job. This is because the traditional norm perceives water collecting as the responsibility

of women, which hinders and limits their access to education, opportunities, personal development, and socio-economic participation. This gendered division of labour reinforces inequalities and creates structural barriers that restrict women's social mobility and perpetuate cycles of poverty and exclusion. Interviews with the community highlight the significant impact the scarcity of water has on women's daily lives. Many women report waking up before dawn to fetch water, which not only puts physical strain on them but also limits their time for schooling, adding burden to their other work responsibilities. The responsibility of collecting water primarily falls on women and young girls, with men rarely participating in this task or engaging in domestic work. This division not only negatively impacts women's health and quality of life, but also restricts their participation in broader community life by limiting their time. In particular, these responsibilities hinder young girls' educational attainment, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and limiting their prospects. The ineffective implementation of water management policies and infrastructure, despite the government's efforts to improve water accessibility through major schemes, significantly exacerbates these challenges due to their inadequate maintenance or poor execution. The lack of maintenance and oversight by both local and state authorities reflects a failure in governance, compounding the hardship faced by the Liangmai women. To address this issue, empowering the community, particularly women, to participate in water management decisions can enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of these issues. However, this requires the women to allow their opinions to be included in the leadership. Raising awareness about the importance of shared domestic responsibilities, eradicating gender roles, and ensuring government schemes reach their intended beneficiaries requires greater transparency and accountability from local officials.

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Printed by : Akshay 9820 142 412