



**IMPACT** The Future Makers

Edited by  
Central Research Committee  
Shri Shikshayatan College

**Edited by**  
Central Research Committee  
Shri Shikshayatan College



Som Publishing



Shri Shikshayatan College



IMPACT

The Future Makers



# IMPACT

**The Future Makers**

**Edited by**

Central Research Committee  
Shri Shikshayatan College



Som Publishing

## **IMPACT : The Future Makers**

### **Editorial Board**

Dr Jayati Das (Jt. Convenor), Dr Sushobhona Pal (Jt. Convenor)  
Dr Rumpa Chakraborty (Jt. Convenor), Dr Debirupa Basu  
Dr Suchhanda Ghosh, Dr Chitralekha Sengupta  
Dr Raikamal Pal, Dr Sutapa Roy  
Smt. Baidehi Mukherjee, Dr Hoimi Mukherjee  
Dr Susmita Karmakar

### **First Published :**

December, 2025

ISBN : 978-93-92332-96-8

© Shri Shikshayatan College, Kolkata

### **Cover Design :**

Amit Mondal

Published by **SOM PUBLISHING**  
21, Kanai Dhar Lane , Kolkata 700 012  
Ph - 9330843618  
Email : *sompublishing16@gmail.com*  
collaborate with  
Shri Shikshayatan College,  
11 Lord Sinha Road, Kolkata 700071

### **Printer:**

Maa Shitala Printing Works  
13, Shashibhusan Dey Street, Kolkata 700012

Price : 425.00

Dedicated to  
All Faculty Members and Students,  
of Shri Shikshayatan College, Kolkata



## **Editorial**

The Central Research Committee of Shri Shikshayatan College has in its presence of eleven years been able to successfully publish every year\_Impact\_, a compilation of research articles authored by both students and teachers. It provides a valuable window into the consistent development in student research orientation. The present work is another step forward in that direction.

The initiative seeks to inculcate a research inclination particularly among students. In order to reach out to a wider readership, preparing Impact as an open access journal, is our next goal. 2025 is witnessing the 3rd ISBN edition of research compilation- Impact , The future makers.

We thank the Principal, Shri Shikshayatan College, Dr. Tania Chakravarthy, the Management, Shri Shikshayatan College, all paper contributors and the publisher in extending their hand to make this issue a success.

3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2025

**Editorial Board**



## Contents

### **GROWING CHALLENGES OF PCOD/PCOS AND ITS AWARENESS**

**A case study based on survey conducted across college  
students of Kolkata**

Ekta Hirawat || 1 - 21

### **Gendering AI: Engaging with Remedies to Gender Bias in AI**

Hoimi Mukherjee || 22 - 35

### **KOLKATA AIR CHALLENGE**

Sakshi Rai & Dr. Jayati Das || 36 - 49

### **The Haunting Presence of The Past; Re-Searching The Horrors of History, Gender And Identity In The Memories of Innocence**

Shruti Dugar & Smt. Baidehi Mukherjee || 50 - 74

### **Gender Difference in Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour: An Achievement Perspective**

Ms. Sreeparna Chowdhury || 75 - 107

### **MEN WRITTEN BY WOMEN: EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF FEMINISM ON MEN'S ACTIVISM IN INDIAN CINEMATIC SPACE**

Sristi Sharma & Baidehi Mukherjee || 108 - 126

### **The Sinking Edge: Coastal Flooding, Adaptation and Mitigation in Indian Sundarbans**

Vareeja Ratna & Amrin Khatun || 127 - 145

### ***The Cartoon Complex: Male Anxiety and the New Woman* Editorial Cartoons from *Sachitra Shishir* and *Sanivarer Chithi (1921-29)***

Mallika Roy Chowdhury || 146 - 176

**The Detective Police Association In The Detective  
Narratives of Hemendra Kumar Roy**

Piu Guha || 177 - 190

**Women's Resistance Across Time: Sita's 'Bhumipraves' And Nora's 'Door Slam'**

Anandi Bhanja & Debolina Guha Thakurta || 191 - 206

**Market Incentives vs. Policy Friction: Assessing the Costs of  
Disjointed Green Credit Guidelines on Corporate  
Decarbonization Strategy in India**

Tanisha Todi & Dr Jayati Das || 207 - 230

# GROWING CHALLENGES OF PCOD/PCOS AND ITS AWARENESS

A case study based on survey conducted across  
college students of Kolkata

**Ekta Hirawat**

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR  
(B.COM EVENING DEPT.)  
SHRI SHIKSHAYATAN COLLEGE

## **ABSTRACT:**

*Polycystic Ovary Disorder (PCOD) is a hormonal disorder that affects women of reproductive age, with a prevalence of 5–10% globally. Alarmingly, PCOD is increasingly being diagnosed among teenagers, with a significant impact on their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. This study aims to investigate the rising problem of PCOD among teenagers, exploring its causes, symptoms, diagnosis, and management. The study reveals that the incidence of PCOD among teenagers is on the rise, with factors such as genetic predisposition, obesity, sedentary lifestyle, and environmental toxins contributing to its development. On the basis of a targeted survey conducted around the metropolitan city of Kolkata the study emphasizes on the need for increased awareness to diagnose and manage the condition effectively.*

**Index terms:** *Polycystic Ovary Disorder (PCOD), GEN-Zs ,Hormonal disorder ,Reproductive health, Awareness*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Women's healthcare is a fundamental aspect of public health that directly impacts the well-being of half of the global population. Health is a primary determinant of quality of life, and for women, it influences not only their physical condition but also their social and economic participation in society. Over the years, women's healthcare has evolved through significant medical advances and policy changes. However, challenges such as maternal mortality, reproductive health issues, and insufficient access to healthcare in many parts of the world continue to hinder the achievement of optimal health outcomes for women.

One of the prominent problems that is persisting these days is related to Gynaecological concerns. Women, being so vulnerable not only in economic and social terms but also in biological terms, are exposed to various types of infections and other reproductive diseases that are increasing quite rapidly. One of these is – Polycystic Ovarian Disease (PCOD), also known as Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS), is a common hormonal disorder that affects people with ovaries, often during their reproductive years. It is one of the most prevalent endocrine conditions among women, with an estimated 5% to 10% of the global female population affected. Despite its high prevalence, PCOD remains a condition that is often misunderstood, underdiagnosed, and undertreated. The complexity of its symptoms, which can vary greatly from person to person,

makes it difficult to diagnose and manage effectively without proper awareness.

PCOD is characterized by a combination of symptoms and hormonal imbalances. The most notable features include irregular or absent menstrual cycles, anovulation (lack of ovulation), elevated levels of androgens (male hormones like testosterone), and the development of multiple cysts in the ovaries. These cysts are essentially immature follicles that fail to release eggs during the menstrual cycle, which leads to their accumulation. However, it is important to note that not every person with PCOD will have all of these features, as the condition presents itself in a variety of ways. In addition to reproductive issues, PCOD can have several other physical and emotional effects. Common symptoms include excessive hair growth (hirsutism), acne, scalp thinning, and weight gain, particularly around the abdomen. These manifestations, especially the visible symptoms like facial hair and acne, can cause emotional distress and negatively impact an individual's self-esteem and mental health. As a result, people with PCOD often experience heightened anxiety, depression, and body image concerns.

As healthcare systems adapt and grow, it is essential to address these challenges and ensure that women everywhere have access to quality, affordable, and culturally competent healthcare.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER**

- To find out the causes of PCOD/PCOS among the youth these days.
- To study the awareness and attitude towards these health challenges.
- To suggest various measures that can help us create a sustainable health care.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

For the particular study, a descriptive research method has been used. In order to understand the behavioural aspects, a purposive and convenience based sampling method was followed. The major participants were the students from various colleges of the metropolitan city of Kolkata. A complete sample of 400 students was collected out of which few were dropped on the grounds of incompleteness or incorrect information. The study mainly targets the urban society and its lifestyle to address the concerns.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Azziz, R., Carmina, E., Chen, Z., Dumesic, D. A., Laven, J. S. E., & Legro, R. S. (2019) in their paper - *Nature Reviews Disease Primers*, 5(1), 1-24, provide a comprehensive review of PCOS, outlining the latest understanding of its pathophysiology, clinical features, and management strategies. The authors highlight the importance of distinguishing PCOS from other ovarian disorders, emphasizing the need for accurate diagnosis using the Rotterdam criteria. The paper also discusses the long-

term health risks associated with PCOS, including insulin resistance, obesity, type 2 diabetes, and cardiovascular disease.

Garg, D., Soni, S., & Sharma, P. (2018) in their paper – Prevalence of PCOS in India: A study on the changing patterns in the *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*, 38(5), 643–646 focus on the changing patterns of PCOS prevalence in India, noting an increase in cases in urban areas due to lifestyle changes, such as poor diet, lack of exercise, and high levels of stress. The study also looks at the genetic and environmental factors contributing to PCOS in Indian women. Lifestyle factors such as obesity, poor diet, and sedentary behavior are key contributors to the condition. They also reflect that Indian women often experience delayed diagnosis due to cultural and socioeconomic barriers to healthcare.

Jha, S., & Kumar, S. (2017) in their research paper – Awareness of reproductive health among adolescent girls in India: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 29(6), 697–705 focus on adolescent girls, this study assesses their awareness of reproductive health and menstrual hygiene in India. The research shows that there is a significant lack of awareness about menstrual health, reproductive rights, and family planning among adolescent girls, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. The study finds that cultural taboos and lack of formal education contribute to poor awareness in this demographic.

Knochenhauer, E. S., Powers, R. W., & Azziz, R. (2019) in their paper *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, 94(6), 1865–1870 study the prevalence of polycystic ovary syndrome in the general population, finding that it affects approximately 6–12% of women worldwide. The authors note that the incidence is higher in certain ethnic groups and in women with risk factors such as obesity and insulin resistance.

Laganà, A. S., Garzon, S., & Vitale, S. G. (2019). Psychological impact of PCOS: A comprehensive review. *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, 40(4), 315–321.

This review examines the psychological impact of PCOS, focusing on mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and body image concerns. The authors suggest that the symptoms of PCOS, particularly those related to hirsutism and infertility, significantly affect the mental well-being of women.

Muthu, A., & Babu, P. (2020). Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) versus polycystic ovary disease (PCOD): A comparative review. *International Journal of Women's Health*, 12, 145–151. This article compares PCOS and PCOD, exploring their similarities and differences. While PCOS is more widely recognized and studied, the term PCOD is often used informally to describe a milder form of the condition. The authors examine the prevalence, symptoms, and diagnostic approaches to both conditions, emphasizing the clinical challenges in Both conditions are

linked to ovarian cysts, but PCOS involves more severe hormonal imbalance. This paper is particularly useful for understanding the terminological confusion between PCOS and PCOD, providing clarity for clinicians and researchers in differentiating the two.

Pradhan, A., & Jaiswal, P. (2016). Maternal healthcare awareness and utilization in India: An analysis of national health survey data. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, 16, 126. This paper examines maternal healthcare awareness and the utilization of maternal health services in India, using data from the National Family Health Survey. It finds that while awareness about antenatal care is relatively high, utilization of maternal healthcare services remains low, especially in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Lack of transportation, financial barriers, and traditional beliefs contribute to low healthcare utilization. The study stresses the need for better infrastructure and targeted health interventions in rural and remote areas.

Saha, S., & Mehta, K. (2019). Women's health knowledge and its association with healthcare-seeking behavior in India. *International Journal of Public Health*, 64(4), 513–521. The study examines the relationship between women's health knowledge and their healthcare-seeking behavior in India. The research finds that a lack of knowledge about basic health issues like hygiene, sexual health, and reproductive rights negatively affects women's willingness to seek healthcare. It also reveals that women with higher educational levels and urban residents tend to

have better knowledge and greater engagement with health services.

## **MORE ABOUT PCOD/PCOS**

### **CAUSES OF PCOS/PCOD**

1. **Hormonal Imbalance:** One of the most significant causes of PCOS is an imbalance in the levels of hormones such as estrogen, progesterone, and androgens. Elevated levels of androgens (male hormones such as testosterone) can prevent the ovaries from releasing eggs regularly, leading to irregular or absent periods, and sometimes the formation of cysts on the ovaries.
2. **Insulin Resistance:** A large proportion of people with PCOS also exhibit insulin resistance. This means that the body does not use insulin effectively, leading to increased insulin production. High insulin levels can promote the overproduction of androgens, worsening symptoms such as excessive hair growth, acne, and weight gain.
3. **Genetics:** PCOS tends to run in families, suggesting a genetic component. Having a family member with PCOS can increase the likelihood of developing the disorder.
4. **Inflammation:** Chronic low-grade inflammation is often seen in individuals with PCOS. This inflammation can stimulate the ovaries to produce more androgens, further complicating hormonal

balance and contributing to the symptoms of PCOS.

5. **Environmental and Lifestyle Factors:** A sedentary lifestyle, poor diet, high levels of stress, and obesity are additional contributing factors to the development and exacerbation of PCOS. These factors can influence insulin resistance, hormone levels, and overall reproductive health.

### **SYMPTOMS OF PCOS/PCOD**

The symptoms of PCOS can vary greatly depending on the individual. However, the most common symptoms include:

1. **Irregular Menstrual Cycles:** Many individuals with PCOS experience infrequent or absent periods. This occurs due to irregular ovulation, which can result in menstrual cycles that are longer than usual or completely missing.
2. **Excess Androgens:** Elevated male hormones lead to visible symptoms like acne, hirsutism (excessive hair growth on the face, chest, or back), and thinning hair on the scalp. These symptoms can cause significant emotional distress and body image concerns.
3. **Ovarian Cysts:** Ovaries may develop multiple small cysts, which are follicles that have not matured or released eggs. These cysts can be seen on an ultrasound but do not always result in obvious symptoms.

4. **Infertility:** One of the most significant impacts of PCOS is infertility. Because ovulation may not occur regularly or at all, individuals with PCOS often struggle to conceive.
5. **Weight Gain and Obesity:** Insulin resistance can lead to weight gain, particularly around the abdomen. Obesity can worsen symptoms and increase the risk of developing other health conditions, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.
6. **Psychological Impact:** The physical symptoms of PCOS can lead to emotional distress, including anxiety, depression, and issues related to self-esteem. The chronic nature of the condition can contribute to ongoing mental health challenges.

## **ANALYSIS OF THE PRIMARY DATA**

In order to get a better understanding of the situation, the primary survey was done. The targeted group is mainly the young adolescent girls who age is between 18 to 24years. The survey was done via a google form whose link was shared amongst the girls via social media. Proper care was taken that they do not give false answers or irrelevant information.

Basic questions related to awareness about the disease and the precautions girls these are taking have been made. Data was collected on how many of them are suffering or have symptoms related to the disease. Also suggestions were taken on what all measures would they want the

government to initiate with respect to women health and lifestyle.

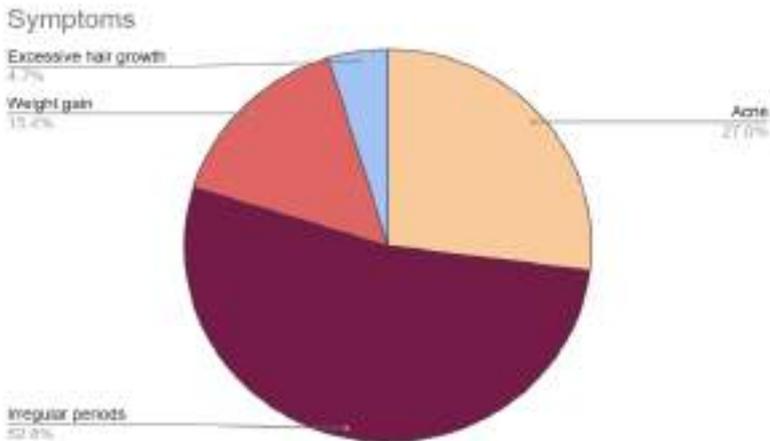
### Familiarity

The respondents were posed question regarding their familiarity with either of the 2 terms. 106 of them said that they know about it whereas 124 of them responded that they have heard about it but do not know much. 86 of them were extremely familiar to the term and seemed to know quite a lot on the subject matter. However, one thing was clear that around 90% of the respondents were not quite clear about the distinction between the 2 terminologies. For them, it was ore like a similar word used interchangeably. Out of the total respondents 124 of them reported to have heard of the problem yet were not knowing much in detail on this problem. 106 of the survey respondents informed that have heard of it but do lack consciousness while 86 of them claimed to have good understanding of the disease and also the various challenges it poses in the life of any suffering person. The rest(around 5%) responded to have never heard of this hormonal disorder among women.

### Symptoms

Major issues related to the disease include hair growth especially on the face, weight gain mostly around the abdomen, acne and the most prominent one irregular menstrual cycle. When asked about their health status, majority of them had some issue or the other which may be

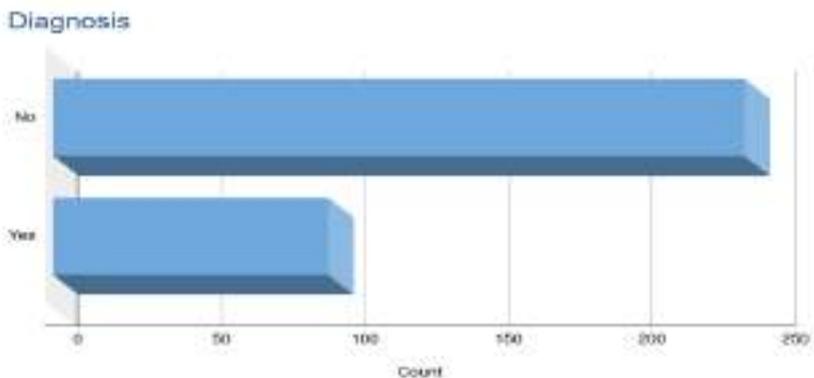
an effect of this problem. It is not mandatory that all of them having any of these problems do have the ailment, rather , we can simply say that there may be a probability of them facing this problem that they still might not have taken care of. As per the data collected, 52.8% have faced the challenge of irregularity in their cycle followed by acne and weight gain. Few of them did have hair growth but it is much insignificant in comparison to the other concerns that arise from this problem.



### Diagnosis

As per the survey, majority of them have not been diagnosed with the disease. Though most of them do have symptoms but they have not taken any aid from the medical experts. This is the major lack of consciousness and early precaution that needs to be taken so that the problem does

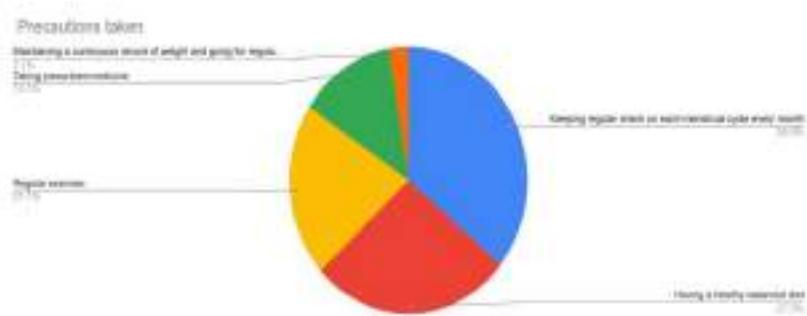
not become chronic. For a significant number of candidates, it seems to be a natural phenomena at this age. Facing ailments and not getting it diagnosed on time is one of the prime reason for the poor health condition of the people in developing countries and this incidence clearly showcases a similar picture. Even though so many young women have faced the usual problems yet around 65% of them have not taken any help or guidance from medical experts.



### Precautions

While the disease as such has no cure, it is believed that a continuous assessment and check on oneself can really work wonders in combating its impacts. Some of the common precautions include maintaining records, taking the necessary medications, exercise, monitoring cycles and lastly ensuring a healthy diet. Monitoring the cycles is the most crucial and necessary step to avoid any gynaecological concerns. As per our sample group, this is equally true.

35.9% do keep an eye on their dates and the flow days. As people these days are anyhow conscious about their health, 27.3% of our respondents give that the priority. Apart from that a considerable group believes in exercising(21.1%) and taking the medicines under any health expert(13.1%).



### Expectations from the Society

On the basis of an open-ended question, there were several answers or rather suggestions that the respondents gave in regard to the support that they would to have from the society and the government. Though most answers were somewhat different, summarising most them into specific goals gives a clear idea. As per their opinion, adequate measures need to be taken at various levels to create a knowledge base on various gynae related problems. Secondly, a few want to have a rigorous curriculum so that exercising becomes a daily part of life for all. Some suggested that health experts should be appointed or visited at regular intervals so that the problem doesnot surface to its extreme. Additionally, what they expect, is the support from the society in terms of psychological and emotional

stress that they undergo during their flow days. People need to understand their pain and help them manage their mood swings and temperamental and hence give less of stress. A competent team of professionals can guide them with the diet charts and food habits as per the challenges they are facing.

## **SUGGESTIVE MEASURES**

### **Promote Healthy Diet and Nutrition**

- **Balanced Diet:** Encourage a diet rich in whole foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Limiting processed foods, excessive sugar, and unhealthy fats is essential.
- **Low-Glycemic Foods:** Since insulin resistance is often associated with PCOD, consuming low-glycemic foods (e.g., legumes, vegetables, and whole grains) can help manage blood sugar levels.
- **Weight Management:** Maintaining a healthy weight can improve hormonal balance and reduce the severity of PCOD symptoms, especially in overweight girls.

### **2. Encourage Regular Physical Activity**

- **Exercise:** Engaging in regular physical activity (30–60 minutes, at least 5 days a week) helps in managing weight, improving insulin sensitivity, and maintaining hormonal balance.
- **Aerobic & Strength Training:** Both aerobic exercises (like walking, cycling) and strength

training can be beneficial in managing PCOD symptoms.

### **3. Promote Awareness and Early Diagnosis**

- **Education:** Raise awareness about PCOD through educational campaigns in schools, healthcare facilities, and communities. Early recognition of symptoms can lead to timely medical intervention.
- **Routine Screening:** Encouraging young girls to undergo routine gynecological check-ups or screenings can help detect early signs of PCOD and prevent complications later.

### **4. Stress Management**

- **Mental Health Awareness:** Stress can worsen PCOD symptoms, so promoting stress management techniques such as mindfulness, yoga and meditation is essential.
- **Adequate Sleep:** Ensuring adequate and restful sleep helps in managing stress and balancing hormones.

### **5. Hormonal Regulation**

- **Medical Management:** In cases where PCOD is detected, treatment options such as hormonal contraceptives, anti-androgens, and medications to regulate menstrual cycles can help manage symptoms.
- **Doctor Consultation:** Regular visits to healthcare providers for hormone checks and symptom

monitoring are vital for managing PCOD in the long term.

## **6. Limit Exposure to Environmental Toxins**

- **Chemical Awareness:** Reducing exposure to endocrine-disrupting chemicals, which can affect hormonal balance, is another measure. These can be found in plastics, pesticides, and certain cosmetics.
- **Avoiding Excessive Exposure to Chemicals:** Encouraging the use of safer, eco-friendly products can help reduce hormone imbalances.

**7. Promote Family Support: A Supportive Environment:** Family plays a crucial role in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Providing a supportive environment for physical activity, healthy eating, and emotional well-being is key in managing PCOD.

**8. Encourage Adequate Hydration: Drink Water:** Staying hydrated can support overall health and help manage symptoms of PCOD by aiding in weight management and reducing bloating.

**9. Alternative Therapies: Herbal Support:** Some studies suggest that herbal remedies like spearmint tea, cinnamon, and fenugreek may help in managing insulin levels and symptoms. However, these should be used under medical supervision.

**10. Community and Peer Support Groups:** Establishing support groups where young girls can learn

from others who have PCOD may help them cope with the condition, share tips, and find encouragement.

By promoting these measures, the incidence of PCOD can be reduced, and its effects can be better managed, leading to improved health outcomes for young girls.

## **CONCLUSION**

The rising incidence of gynaecological issues in India necessitates comprehensive interventions, including awareness campaigns, education programs, and improved healthcare services. Strengthening healthcare infrastructure, especially in rural areas, is crucial to ensure accessible and affordable healthcare services for women. The complexity of PCOS and PCOD, with significant variation in diagnostic criteria, prevalence rates, and treatment strategies need more attention. The studies emphasize the importance of early diagnosis and comprehensive care, including both medical and psychological support. Continued research is needed to refine diagnostic approaches, improve treatment protocols, and better understand the long-term implications of these disorders.

**REFERENCES:**

Azziz, R., Carmina, E., Chen, Z., Dumesic, D. A., Laven, J. S. E., & Legro, R. S. (2019). Polycystic ovary syndrome. *Nature Reviews Disease Primers*, 5(1), 1-24.

Bansal, R., & Yadav, R. (2018). Gender-based disparities in health awareness and outcomes in India: A review. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(3), 271-284.

Das, A., & Varma, R. (2018). Awareness and healthcare utilization patterns among women in rural India: A community-based study. *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*, 37(1), 1-9.

Goswami et al. (2019). Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS): A review of the current status in India. *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, 13(9), 1-5.

Jain et al. (2018). Prevalence and risk factors of urinary incontinence among women in India. *Journal of Mid-Life Health*, 9(2), 53-58.

Jha, S., & Kumar, S. (2017). Awareness of reproductive health among adolescent girls in India: A cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health*, 29(6), 697-705.

Knochenhauer, E. S., Powers, R. W., & Azziz, R. (2019). The prevalence of polycystic ovary syndrome in the general population. *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*, 94(6), 1865-1870.

March, W. A., Moore, V. M., & Willson, K. J. (2010). The prevalence of polycystic ovary syndrome in a community sample assessed under contrasting diagnostic criteria. *Human Reproduction*, 25(2), 541-547.

- Muthu, A., & Babu, P. (2020). Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) versus polycystic ovary disease (PCOD): A comparative review. *International Journal of Women's Health*, *12*, 145–151.
- Patel, V., & Chatterjee, S. (2020). The role of community health workers in improving women's healthcare awareness in India. *Global Health Action*, *13*(1), 1812347.
- Pradhan, A., & Jaiswal, P. (2016). Maternal healthcare awareness and utilization in India: An analysis of national health survey data. *BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth*, *16*, 126. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-016-0925-3>
- Saha, S., & Mehta, K. (2019). Women's health knowledge and its association with healthcare-seeking behavior in India. *International Journal of Public Health*, *64*(4), 513–521. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00038-019-01271-x>
- Sharma, S., & Gupta, P. (2020). Awareness of cervical cancer and screening practices among women in India: A multi-center study. *Journal of Gynecologic Oncology*, *31*(2), e30.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

This project would not have been possible without the permission and support of the Teacher -in Charge of Shri Shikshayatan College – Dr. Papiya Chaudhury. I would also like to thank all the professors who are in the Students’ Council for the continuous efforts in helping me conduct the survey in a smooth way. Their confidence in me is really an encouraging factor for having completed it in the desired manner. Lastly I would thank all the students who actively responded to all the questions post their awareness program on the same. Their insightful suggestions added to the robustness of the study.

# **Gendering AI: Engaging with Remedies to Gender Bias in AI**

**Hoimi Mukherjee**

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science

*As Artificial Intelligence-based tools are being used in multiple services and industries, implicit gender biases within these tools have been observed, which reinforces unequal gender stereotypes. This article addresses this problem through a literature review to present the various ways in which technology can be gendered and the causal factors. Noting the lack of global regimes that may regulate these biases, this article concludes with policy recommendations.*

With the proliferation of tools that utilise Artificial Intelligence (AI) in every sphere of life, its increased and unregulated accessibility to the masses, concerns have been raised about the relationship between human beings and technology. The ethics of AI use, distribution and control over AI creation and resources expended in its development have been major points of debate (UN Women 2024). Since its introduction in commercial use, the ethical and distributive debate has focused on the issue of gender and AI. Studies have shown that tools that use AI in everyday life exhibit discernible gender biases, adversely affecting women. Multiple scholars have pointed to the discriminatory tendencies of AI that are widening the technological gap between men and women and

diminishing the hope in the emancipatory potential of AI in transforming the established orders.

The central puzzle of this article is to examine the relationship between gender and AI, along with the ramifications of its use. Using Webster and Watson's (2002) literature review method, this study outlines the theoretical precepts of the relationship between gender and AI. Then, an overview of gendering in AI is presented, outlining the detrimental and beneficial aspects of AI with regard to gender equity goals. Subsequently, existing policy prescriptions and recommendations derived from the secondary literature are presented to offer multiple ways in which 'regendering' in AI can be done.

### **Theoretical Bases of AI and Gender**

According to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, an artificial system developed in computer software, physical hardware, or other context that solves tasks requiring human-like perception, cognition, planning, learning, communication, or physical action is Artificial Intelligence (AI) (The Office of the President, Government of the United States 2020). One of the chief characteristics of AI is the continuous training of the host computer systems so as to reduce and substitute human oversight. Since AI competes with human intelligence, the maximisation of efficiency has been the rationale for introducing AI to machines which perform increasingly complex tasks. This has affected the present employment dynamics in the form of job cuts, with machines replacing

human workers and drastically reducing future employment opportunities, including rendering multiple jobs obsolete. These tendencies result in AI being characterised as ‘disruptive technologies’ that fundamentally alter the way society, governments and markets function (Girasa 2020; Piloto 2025).

Additionally, the unregulated nature of AI access and use, which is facilitated by nearly non-existent governmental and global regulatory regimes, makes control over its content very difficult. The lack of human oversight, consequently, human morality that engages with the topic of just versus unjust makes the content produced by AI evade filters to check discriminatory biases and may foment conflict. The widespread use of sophisticated “deep-fakes”, distorted videos and lack of accountability of the distributors of such content within the larger misinformation campaigns have characterised global elections, large-scale riots and communal tensions. Furthermore, the perception of AI being factual and beyond bias is due to the technology being embedded in machines, not bogged down by human sensibilities and biases, which promotes the narrative that having normative considerations of thinking about good versus bad is inconvenient and unreliable. This seemingly ‘factual’ aspect of AI is based on data sets that the machines were trained on by human trainers who have their biases (UN Women 2024). These biases can extend to gender relations where systems using AI have reinforced heteronormative gender

ideas that have significant societal ramifications (Chin-Rothmann and Robison 2023).

With regard to gender, gender is the socially constructed role corresponding to the biological sexes, where biological males are expected to be masculine and females are feminine. These include a range of behaviours that are deemed socially appropriate as per one's gender, which are transmitted throughout one's life and institutionalised through the process of socialisation by various agents (Mikkola 2024). Since the 1970s, gender has been conceptualised as 'performative' and not natural; that is, one behaves in socially approved gender roles to normalise gender identities (Butler 1988). Gender relations were critically examined to reveal the power asymmetries, where the masculine has been privileged over the feminine across contexts and the second-wave feminist movements have focused on addressing this axis of inequality.

Within institutions, Feminist Institutionalists point to informal structures, like "masculine and feminine norms and daily gendered practices that maintain hierarchies of status and domination, reproduce expectations about appropriate men's and women's capacities, behaviour and roles", creating a gendered logic of appropriateness (Mackay et al. 2010). These apply even to the institutions that work on technology, specifically AI, where the gendered logic of appropriateness affects the biases that shape the content. Few women are employed in these companies that work on AI, drawn from a small pool of women who are enrolled in

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) courses, which leads to a lack of diverse views and normalisation of male biases (UN Women). Hence, to study the gendering of AI, examining AI institutions may reveal fundamental biases and offer methods to overcome them. Feminist Institutionalism argues that regendering is a process whereby a change in the gendered norms and practices within the institutions can be effected, usually through the increase of feminine agents (Mackay et al. 2010). Regendering within institutions that deal with technology can be one method to change these biases.

The gendering of technology framework explains how AI is imbued with a social identity, reflecting and reinforcing the prevalent gender norms (Green and Singleton 2013). This process shapes human perceptions and interactions with technology according to gender roles, which means the impact of technology is not neutral but varies according to gender. This undermines the potential of AI technology to regender society, tackle biases and aid in empowering women.

### **Evaluation of the Impact of AI on Gender**

AI technology operates on algorithms, which transform input data into output data based on computation and problem-solving instructions (Manasi et al. 2023). The output is dependent on the input data and the data set on which the system is trained, where the inherent biases of the human trainer are translated into the instructions. These instructions shape the algorithm's decision-making and

over a while, reinforce biases. One of the common instances of gendered bias is observed in results about professions, where content on doctor has “he” pronoun, while a nurse is feminine (UN Women 2024). This conforms to the gendered division of labour, where female subjects are assigned to professions that are of lower pay and prestige compared to men. This result is due to “word embeddings” in machine language, where the certain ways that trainers encode words show their meanings and associations (Manasi et al. 2023). In developing the language/medium between humans and machines through such word embeddings, the “linguistic biases” of the trainers are transmitted and adopted (Manasi et al. 2023).

These biases point to the institutionalisation of the masculine ethos within technology companies, which is a direct result of the marginalisation of women and non-binary individuals in such spaces. The Gender Gap Report 2024 highlights that only thirty per cent of AI developers were women, which would lead to fewer alternate or diverse perspectives of gender relations being available for the machines to be trained on and for the correction of linguistic biases (Pal et al. 2024). This lack of women AI developers is symptomatic of the STEM field, where only twenty-nine per cent of these jobs employ women and hence, the pool to derive women AI developers is small (UN Women 2024). Furthermore, women constitute twenty per cent of employees in prominent machine learning companies, twelve per cent of AI researchers and six per cent of professional software developers (UNESCO

2024). At the academic level, only eighteen per cent of authors in AI conferences and less than twenty per cent of professors working on AI technology were women (UNESCO 2024). This reinforces the lack of diversity in designing and training in AI, which generates these biases. This marginalisation of women due to the gendered division of labour, where women bear the double burden of domestic responsibilities and remunerative work, is compounded by societal attitudes of women not being suitable for STEM work and being generalised as poorly adjusted to technology (Manasi et al. 2023). This results in an informal institutional structure where women need to negotiate with norms which consider men as more suitable and are expressed in the form of exclusion from male groups, comments and even sexist crimes.

This normative masculine bias affects gender roles in multiple adverse ways. As the word embeddings associate males with high-paying and prestigious jobs, they also associate adventure, travel and discovery with men, which implies that men have agency and can transcend the public-private divide (UNESCO 2024). The correspondence of femininity with the household reduced women to roles that are traditionally undervalued, reaffirming the conventional gender roles and erasing the diversity of women's professional and personal experiences.

This bias also translates to differing standards of services. The Berkeley Haas Centre for Equity, Gender and Leadership found that of 133, forty-four per cent of 133 AI

systems across industries demonstrated gender biases that impact how women deal with technology (quoted in UN Women 2024). These AI systems have a poor record of identifying women's symptoms and generate disproportionately faulty credit ratings for them (UN Women 2024). This is a direct result of not using adequate data from women patients or adjusting to the reality of the gendered division of labour by making male earnings the standard. Similarly, a UNESCO(2024) study revealed that Large Language Models, which are the base of Chat GPT 3.5 and Llama 2, show clear bias against women. This is concerning given that these are open sources, free and most commonly used. Biases may lead to women not using these services, widening the digital divide and reinforcing the cycle of exclusion from technology.

Scholars have also analysed gendering in AI through the case of using feminine voice for AI-based virtual assistants like Apple's Siri, Microsoft's Cortana and Amazon's Alexa, among others (UNESCO 2022; Manasi et al. 2023; Chin-Rothmann and Robison 2020; Chen et al. 2024). This aspect shows the gendering of technology approach, where AI-based virtual assistants were endowed with an identity that reflects gender norms as elucidated further (Green and Singleton 2013).

The default use of feminine voice was designed to mimic socially desirable feminine traits of submissiveness, being caring and intuitive (Manasi et al. 2023). Chen et al. (2024) also point out how the names are stereotypically feminine,

contrasting with IBM's virtual assistant, Watson, who gave a masculine name and voice. Watson was characterised as "efficient and authoritative", traits which are typically seen as masculine and deployed in providing instructions and teaching (Chen et al. 2024). Manasi et al. (2023) cite the example of Japanese robots being gendered according to purpose: male robots for security issues while female robots for reception. Similarly, after the COVID-19 pandemic, most AI-based chatbots seen on websites and applications are female if they operate in the hospitality, retail, and education sectors. Another study on AI yielded that leadership prompts generated different results; male leaders were described as 'strong, charismatic and intimidating', while female leaders were 'ineffective, emotional, fearful' and people pleasers (Newstead et al. 2023). A disproportionate number of females were seen as bad leaders, while only a quarter of male leaders were categorised as such in this study. This study also used gender-neutral prompts on leadership for the AI writing tool, but the content had no feminine characteristics nor mention of a good historical female figure (Newstead et al. 2023). This aligns with the gendered division of labour as discussed, where assertiveness, leadership and efficiency in serious occupations like security (Masculine) are sharply contrasted with submissiveness and care work (feminine) according to the profession and purpose, making gender differences evident.

Expanding on this aspect, scholars argue that virtual assistants also perform affective labour, that is, demonstrate behaviour or activities that fulfil the emotional needs of others, typically expected of female agents. These activities include caring, listening, comforting and reassuring, accompanied by scheduling, reminding, making lists and seeking information (Manasi et al. 2023). Hullin (2023) argues that technology, especially those which are categorised as disruptive, can evoke suspicion among the masses. To overcome this reluctance to use these technologies, AI companies made their devices mimic voices that inspire ‘kindness, benevolence and sweetness’, stereotypically associated with women (Hullin 2023). Their utilisation is largely seen in the domestic or private spaces, subtly bringing forth the gendered private and public divide. The gendering of technological objects is also observed when AI-based humanoids like Sophia are given the shape of an exceptionally attractive woman (Manasi et al. 2023). Feminine AI agents were subjected to violence like objectification and verbal harassment, where largely male subjects were the perpetrators. Alexa, Siri, Cortana and Google Assistant (which has a female voice) initially showed ‘evasive, subservient and seemingly thankful’ responses when suggestive or flirty comments were aimed at them, but after complaints, the technology companies re-trained these assistants to respond more negatively, with Alexa being equipped with a ‘disengage mode’ after verbal harassment (Fessler 2017; Chin-Rothmann and Robison 2020; Manasi et al. 2023).

The real-world impact of these gendering tendencies can be observed in various cases: these gendered biases create perceptions, and when used by millions for “truthful/factual” content, they enhance inequalities. The feminised AI services pose a risk to women’s employment prospects as their jobs in relatively low-paid, labour-intensive sectors like hospitality may be mechanised the earliest (UN Women 2024; UNESCO 2022). As discussed above, the lack of data related to biological females or feminine attributes risks misdiagnosis, difficulty in availing credit and quality of services; for instance, Amazon had to discontinue its AI hiring tool as it discriminated against women applicants (Manasi et al. 2023). These biases project poor opinions regarding women leaders and convey that women lack leadership skills. These impact representations across institutions, from corporate workplaces to parliaments, are already characterised by a relatively lower number of women.

The association of occupations with gendered traits create a link between high-prestige jobs and attributes of men, while affective and domestic labour for women is normalised through the feminised AI assistants (UNESCO 2024). Furthermore, the tacit acceptance of violence by the AI assistants shapes how men interact with technology and normalise harassment. Since these differences affect how women and men access and use AI, these biases may create hesitancy among women and widen the digital divide between men and women (Otis et al. 2025). Finally, AI

conforms to the heteronormative, two-gender model, creating a crisis when it comes to representing non-binary and gender-fluid individuals.

However, presenting the detrimental impact of gender bias in AI provides a partial view, as AI has been instrumental in empowering women in multiple ways. AI can be used to remedy the biases which have been identified: gender decoders functioning on AI can facilitate a gender-sensitive hiring process and can help assess the Fundamental Rights Impact arising from such biases (Manasi et al. 2023). AI is being used to correct the gender biases underlying faulty credit scoring given to women and ease their access to microfinancing (UN Women 2025). As a monitoring tool, AI has pointed to gender bias in textbooks and identified a disparity between male and female enrollment in websites like Coursera and edX, indicating areas for intervention (UN Women 2025). Additionally, AI can aid in improving women's status in politics by drawing up gender-sensitive laws and tracking representation across political institutions, allowing for regendering through affirmative action policies. Moreover, services like Sophia and rAIInbow provide survivors of sexual crimes access to legal remedies, while bSafe has safety alerts (UN Women 2025).

### **Policy Recommendations to Combat Gender Bias**

Given the repercussions of gender bias in AI systems in a context where a rapid transition to such technologies is

being observed, intervention at various levels must be effected. Since AI is fluid, transnational regulatory regimes may be required for the participation of multiple states, international organisations and corporations. UN Women (2024) has highlighted a ‘global governance deficit’ when it comes to addressing the challenges of AI.

However, certain international agreements have been discussed between these parties, like the UNESCO Recommendations on Ethics of AI, passed in 2021 and eight technology companies endorsed it, including Microsoft (UNESCO 2024). In 2024, a Global Digital Compact was negotiated to prioritise gender concerns (UN Women 2024). In 2017, the European Parliament passed a framework that was aimed at these biases in AI (Manasi et al. 2023). UNESCO and Digital Promise collaborated to create ethical AI for education worldwide, which can be incorporated into the European Union Digital Competence Framework as well as Digital India portals (Barron and Bentil 2024).

Chin-Rothmann and Robison (2020) lay out some recommendations that can directly address the problem of gendered biases in AI: first, during the humanisation of AI where gender biases are encoded, there need to be industry-wide standards to check or audit such biases and AI gender bias decoders may be useful. Second, gender diversity within developing teams must be encouraged for more comprehensive data and services. To tackle the digital divide where women are reluctant to use AI products due

to these gender biases, the data on which the machines are trained must have diverse trainers and such information regarding diversity pools must be regularly published by the companies. Third, facilitate the inclusion of women into STEM fields in academia, industry, institutions and governance structures. This compounds the benefits of the second recommendation, allowing for more representative, gender-sensitive AI products. This can be realised through government policies that allow for quotas and increased funding from government agencies and companies to encourage more women to participate and collaborate across organisations. Needless to say, these recommendations apply to the inclusion of non-binary individuals as well.

Amidst the concerning development in the US, where the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies that promoted fair treatment, representation and promotion of minorities in employment and education were removed by the current regime, global solidarities in this field are crucial to reducing the technology-based biases (Partridge 2025). Some of these recommendations may help in this objective and the transparent, open character of AI invites global collaboration and may enable global oversight. Global standards of disruptive technologies may evolve, but having adequate representation in framing these can prevent and correct gendered biases.

# KOLKATA AIR CHALLENGE

**Sakshi Rai**

Class of 2024,

**Dr. Jayati Das**

Associate Professor, Department of Geography

## **Abstract**

Kolkata faces significant air quality challenges, particularly during winter months, with PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels exceeding standards due to low wind dispersion and increased emissions from heating and transport. While Kolkata's air quality has improved compared to 2019, it still struggles with pollution, especially in industrial areas like Howrah.

In this study, the levels of different **pollutants** such as PM<sub>2.5</sub>, CO, SO<sub>2</sub>, and NO<sub>2</sub> and their variable impact on the people and the environment during the **pre-covid (2018)**, **covid (2020)**, and **post-covid (2022)** years have been examined. Air pollution in Kolkata is caused by emissions from industries, dust particles, and mainly **vehicular smoke**. Therefore, **respiratory diseases** like ARI, COPD, Influenza, etc. occur among the residents. A positive correlation is observed between the **AQI Levels** and the increase in the number of vehicles over the years. The West Bengal Pollution Control Board has adopted various mitigation measures to improve the air quality in the city.

**Keywords:** outdoor air pollution, AQI, traffic, human health

## **Introduction**

Air pollution is a condition in which certain substances are present in concentrations that can have negative effects on people and the environment.

The research paper discusses the issues of air pollution in Kolkata for years, which has been a persistent problem for decades. The city's rapid urbanisation and lack of effective government control have contributed to the problem. The study aims to present the current state of air pollution in the city by analysing various pollutants like Suspended Particulate Matter (SPM), NO<sub>2</sub>, and SO<sub>2</sub>.

## **Literature review**

Several authors have discovered various causes, reasons, and aspects of air pollution in Kolkata. Senaul Haque and R.B. Singh (2017) discussed in their project how air quality impacts the sustainability of the city and leads to respiratory health issues such as acute respiratory infections (ARI). J. Spiroska et al. (2011) identified rapid urbanization as a significant effect of air pollution in Kolkata. We have aimed to illustrate the impact of air pollution in Kolkata during the pre-COVID, COVID, and post-COVID periods.

## **Objectives**

- It draws attention to the causes of rising levels of air pollution in Kolkata.
- It assesses the impact of air pollution on the residents and the surrounding environment.

- It examines the appropriate measures to control this surge of air pollution in the city.

### **Methods adopted**

Several research papers collected relevant non-governmental publications and various websites from different institutions, gathering diverse articles and studies addressing air pollution in Kolkata. Both qualitative and quantitative information on the causes, objectives, effects, and management of air pollution in Kolkata was gathered and analysed. Additionally, we aimed to demonstrate the spatial distribution of various air pollution parameters along with suitable cartograms.

### **Discussion**

We have selected Kolkata as our study area for the project because it is one of the fastest-growing cities in India and has been facing significant air pollution.

Several factors contribute ( Fig 1) to the deterioration of air quality in Kolkata, with transportation being the primary issue. The prevalence of poorly maintained vehicles, the use of petrol fuel, and inadequate regulations make transportation a major contributor to air pollution. Additionally, there are three thermal power plants in and around Kolkata that negatively impact air quality. Furthermore, various small industries within the city also contribute to air pollution. It is noted that generators used during power cuts also contribute to air pollution in the city to some extent.

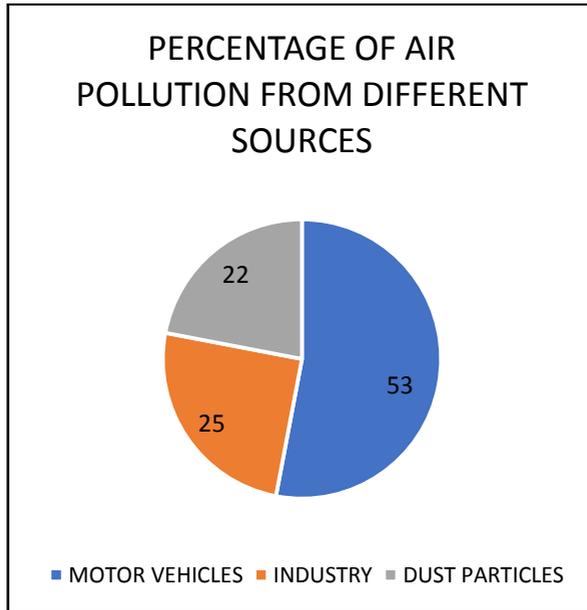


Fig 1

According to the State of Global Air (SOGA) report, 2022, Kolkata, ranks as the second most polluted city in the world. Kolkata has an annual average of  $84 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  of fine particulate matter ( $\text{PM}_{2.5}$ ), 17 times the recommended WHO safe limit.

During the 2018 pre-COVID period, the Carbon Monoxide (CO) concentration in the air in Kolkata was 200–300 ppm, followed by 100–200 ppm in its surrounding areas.

During COVID-19 (2020), the concentration became so low to 50-100 ppm in Kolkata and 0-50 ppm in its surrounding areas due to the lockdown.

However, during post-COVID times (2022), a rise in CO concentration in the air in Kolkata and its surrounding areas can be seen with an average of 250 ppm of carbon monoxide.

In Shyambazar area in 2018(pre-Covid) the concentration of SO<sub>2</sub> level is lower than in Covid period and post-Covid period recorded at 6.12 micrograms per cubic meter(ug/m<sup>3</sup>). In 2020 and 2022, SO<sub>2</sub> concentration was 6.63(ug/m<sup>3</sup>) and 9.04 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>) respectively, year 2022 recorded the highest concentration of SO<sub>2</sub>. In Behala SO<sub>2</sub> concentration in 2018 was 4.87(ug/m<sup>3</sup>), in 2020 during Covid concentration increased to 6.5(ug/m<sup>3</sup>) and in 2022 concentration decreased to 5.9 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>). In Tollygunge SO<sub>2</sub> concentration in 2018 was 3.83 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>), in 2020 concentration was 4.6 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>) but in 2022 concentration is lower than in 2018 and 2020 which is 3.3 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>). In Minto Park 2018 have SO<sub>2</sub> concentration of 4.71(ug/m<sup>3</sup>), in 2020 and 2022 it is 6.74(ug/m<sup>3</sup>) and 6.3(ug/m<sup>3</sup>) respectively. In Picnic Garden low concentration was seen in 2018 is 3.3 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>) and in 2020 concentration is 6.6 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>) and in 2022 SO<sub>2</sub> concentration increased to 9.5 (ug/m<sup>3</sup>), here 2022 concentration increased by 6.2% and 2.9% as compared to 2018 and 2020. The concentration of SO<sub>2</sub> increases due to increasing urbanization, burning of fossil fuel, etc. (West Bengal Pollution Control Board)

(The trend of pollutant  $\text{NO}_2$ , from the collected data from WBPCB, 2018–2022, observed that the year 2021 has the lowest concentration of  $\text{NO}_2$ , which is 36.76 ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{qb.m}$ ), while the highest concentration of 44.204 ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{qb.m}$ ) in the year 2022. The increase is about 11% in the city. In all these years there has been an increasing trend in the region. The high concentration is attributed to the heavy traffic in the Kolkata metropolitan area (West Bengal Pollution Control Board report, 2022)

The concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  pollutants has been represented by a simple bar graph (Fig:1.9) showing the seasonal change in the concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  over the years (2018, 2020, 2022). It is seen that the lowest concentration was recorded in the monsoon of 2020 (02  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ). The highest  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  concentration is recorded in the winter season of 2022 (97  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}$ ). It can be interpreted that season-wise the concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  pollutants over the years is highest in the winter season whereas the lowest concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  over the years is in the pre-monsoon season followed by the monsoon season. Pollution levels in winter are high because the air becomes denser and moves slower than the warm air, causing a lack of ventilation. The concentration of  $\text{PM}_{2.5}$  is increasing due to the increasing number of cars on the road.

The study highlights that during the lockdown in March 2020, there was a significant decrease in Land Surface Temperature (LST) in most areas in Kolkata compared to that of a year back (March 2019).

During the lockdown in Kolkata City (in March 2020), the surface temperature was lower compared to the year before the lockdown (March 2019). The highest land surface temperature range of March 2019 was recorded between 36.27°C–42.62°C while in March 2020 the highest LST range was between 33.57°C– 40.90°C which was less than last year. The lowest temperature range also reduced from March 2019 (26.11°C–30.06°C) to March 2020 (24.36°C–28.32°C).

This drop in temperature during the lockdown might be because of fewer activities emitting pollutants into the air, like cars and factories. (B. Bera, et al, 'Significant impacts of COVID-19 lockdown on urban air pollution in Kolkata (India) and amelioration of environmental health.' Springer, 2020)

### **Land use and Landcover**

Fig 2 shows the change in land use and land cover for the years 1991, 2011, 2031, and 2051 based on the data taken from a research article (Jayatra Mandal et al, 'Urban Growth Dynamics and Changing land-use and land-cover of megacity Kolkata and Its Environs', 2019). The built-up area (ha) has been increasing continuously through decades.

In 1991 the built-up area was recorded as 23834 (ha) whereas in 2011 the built-up area was recorded as 60482 (ha). In 2031 and 2051, the built-up area will achieve 73969 (ha) and 83923 (ha) respectively. In 1991, the city of Kolkata had a 6389 ha water body with 44426 ha

vegetation cover and 51176 ha fallow land. Whereas in 2011, the city had 5602 (ha) water bodies, and 27908 (a) vegetation cover with 31834 (ha) fallow land respectively. In 2031, the city will achieve a 4846 (ha) water body with 22192 (ha) vegetation cover and 24818 (ha) fallow land respectively. In 2051, the predicted scenario of the water body will be 4192 (ha), 19724 (ha) vegetation, and fallow land 19724 (ha) respectively. The growth of population due to high urbanization shows a subsequent decline trend in the water body, vegetation cover, and fallow land.

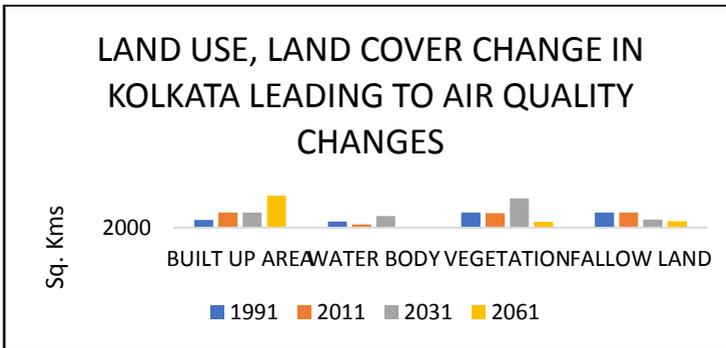


Fig 2

The decadal change in the population of Kolkata during the years 1991, 2011, 2031, and 2051 based on the data taken from a research article (Jayatra Mandal et al, 'Urban Growth Dynamics and Changing Land-Use Land-Cover of Megacity Kolkata and Its Environs', 2019) is being studied. The population in 1991 was 11 million and in 2011 it increased to 14 million. In 2031 and 2051 it is expected that

it will increase to 20 million and 28 million respectively. The line graph shows a positive increasing trend in population over decades which may be due to the flow of migration from the other states of India and from the other regions of West Bengal to Kolkata, due to the concentrated development in business outsourcing, IT, medical facilities etc. in Kolkata.

The land surface temperature of the random points in Kolkata shows how there is a change in the cumulative percentage of temperature in March, April, and May of the random points of Kolkata metropolitan city. In March 2017 the cumulative percentage of temperature was 24.46% which increased to 25.01% in April and again decreased to 23.53% in May. In 2018 the cumulative percentage of the temperature of March is 28.53%, in April it is 25.36%, and in May it is 28.53%. In 2019 lowest cumulative percentage of temperature is seen in March which is 23.84% and in April and May which is 25.1% and 25.15% respectively. In 2020 cumulative percentage of temperature in March was 23.63%, in April it was 24.53% and in May cumulative percentage of temperature decreased to 22.79%. In 2018 highest cumulative percentage of temperature is seen in March, April, and May than in 2017, 2019, 2020. The lowest cumulative percentage of temperature was seen in May 2020. (B. Bera, et al, Springer (2020), 'Significant impacts of COVID-19 lockdown on urban air pollution in Kolkata (India) and amelioration of environmental health'. 2020).

The geographical distribution of vegetation cover in the city of Kolkata helps to comprehend the overall spatial association along with the density of plant species. It must be stated that the physical conditions of Kolkata are exceedingly favourable for the growth of plants and these plants can be placed in vacant spaces (Fort William, Hastings, Victoria Memorial, Maidan, Vidhan Sabha Area, Eden Garden Surroundings, Governors House, Rabindra Sarovar Area, Salt Lake Area, etc.) of the city and roadsides but proportion of vacant space is very much limited in this highly populous city. This plant association would modify the air quality standard for long-term basis. (B. Bera, et al, Springer (2020), 'Significant impacts of COVID-19 lockdown on urban air pollution in Kolkata (India) and amelioration of environmental health'. 2020).

It is observed that emissions from motor vehicles are largely responsible for the air pollution in Kolkata, which is 53%; followed by emissions from industries, accounting for 25%, and then the rest from dust particles, accounting for 22% (Fig.1). The increase in the number of public buses and private cars is mainly responsible for the increasing air pollution in this city.

### **Impacts of Air Pollution on Health**

The diagram (Fig 3) shows the impact of air pollution on health especially in the respiratory system in various metropolitan cities of Kolkata during Pre-Covid, Covid, and Post Covid times (2018, 2020, 2022) from the West Bengal Pollution Control Board.

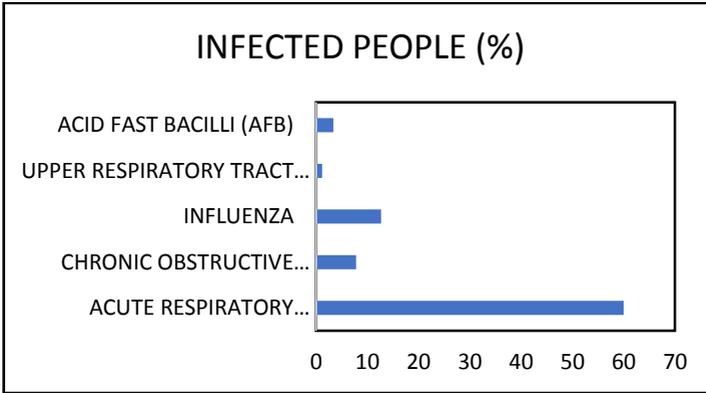


Fig 3

Here, we took five major diseases that cause health problems, they are Acute Respiratory Infection, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Influenza, Upper Respiratory Tract Infection, and Acid-fast bacilli. It has been noted that Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) is the major health problem due to air pollution recording 60% of infected people followed by Influenza with 12.7% of infected people, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) with 7.8% infected people, then Acid-fast bacilli (AFB) with 3.4% and Upper Respiratory Tract Infection (URTI) with 1.2% infected people. Therefore, there is a need to cut air pollution otherwise the health problem will deteriorate more. (Multi-Disciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2022)

The multiple line graph (Fig 4) shows the change in the air quality of five stations in Kolkata: Shyambazar, Behala, Tollygunge, Minto Park, and Picnic Garden, for the pre-

COVID (2018), COVID (2020), and post-COVID (2022) years.

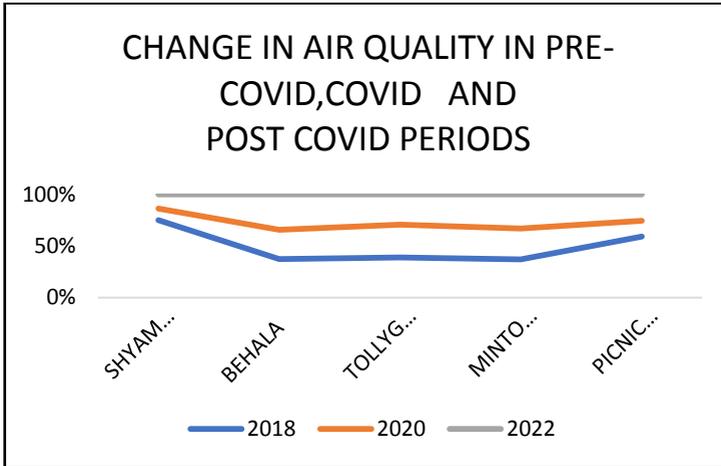


Fig 4

The AQI values have a massive reduction in 2020 indicating betterment of air quality. This is because during the COVID year of 2020; due to the lockdown, there was less use of public as well as private transport, which drastically improved the AQI level of the city.

### **Correlation between AQI and Traffic flow**

The correlation (Fig 5) between AQI level and registered vehicles in 2018, 2020, and 2022 was studied. We can see that there is a positive correlation between the two variables, that is, there is an increase in the AQI level with an increase in the number of registered vehicles. (Mishra SP et al., Anthropocene Air Quality Impact on the Kolkata People, 24 West Bengal Pollution Control Board)

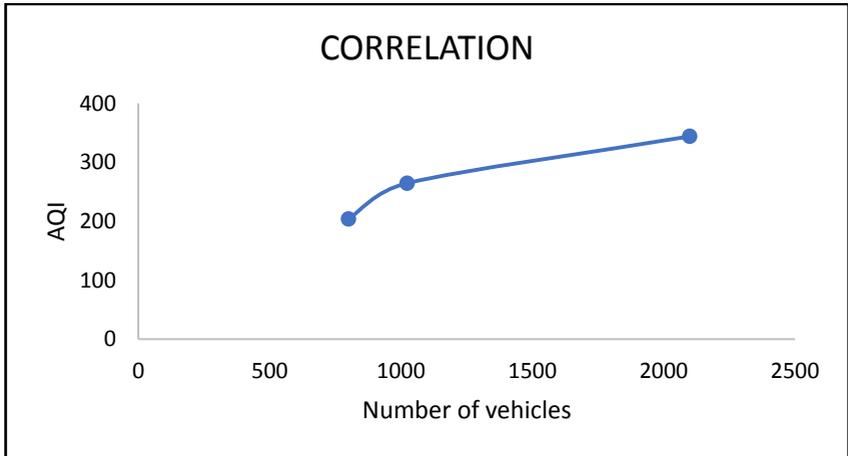


Fig 5

## CONCLUSION

This paper made an endeavor to examine the elements of urban air quality in Kolkata. There were a few difficulties in the last decade to control vehicle discharge and keep the environment clean in the city. Despite the fact that air contamination in the city diminished for the time being because of administrative measures however it began to increase. The air quality in the city fluctuates over the diverse land use zones rather than in the centre and edge of the city.

The West Bengal Pollution Control Board has taken the following actions for the improvement of the air quality of Kolkata. Water sprinkling on busy roads to mitigate air pollution caused by vehicular movement, dousing of fire in existing Dhapa area and dumpsites, strict monitoring of

construction and demolition activities, and complete banning of open burning of solid wastes.

## REFERENCES

- B. Bera, et al, Springer (2020), 'Significant impacts of COVID-19 lockdown on urban air pollution in Kolkata (India) and amelioration of environmental health'. 2020
- Central Pollution Control Board
- Arpita Dutta, Arnab Rao, 'An Overview of Air Pollution and Its Impact on Human Health in Kolkata', International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research
- India Meteorological Department, Kolkata
- West Bengal Pollution Control Board
- Primary Survey, HDPI
- Jayatra Mandal et al, Springer 2019, 'Urban Growth Dynamics and Changing Land-Use Land-Cover of Megacity Kolkata and Its Environs'
- Mishra SP et al., 'Anthropocene Air Quality Impact on the Kolkata People', West Bengal Pollution Control Board

# **The Haunting Presence of The Past; Re–Searching The Horrors of History, Gender And Identity In The Memories of Innocence**

**Shruti Dugar**

M.A. English, Semester–IV, Shri Shikshayatn College

**Smt. Baidehi Mukherjee**

Assistant Professor & P.G. Coordinator,

Department of English, Shri Shikshayatn College

## **ABSTRACT**

Indian English – the most celebrated, yet a controversial term, has always been directed to “infuse in the English expression”, the “tempo of Indian life”. Perhaps, for this reason, the critically acclaimed fiction of the emerging branch of dialect encircles around the locus of the notions that make up this developing nation – its history, its ancestry. Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, in contrast to their predecessors that had charged fiction with glorifying histories of independence, and celebrated conflict of cultural hybridity, thrusts on the surface the harshness of a conjunction of personal and political history. This research attempt to examine the brutality of the historical past that has engraved an unhealing impression in the memories of innocent minds, which has to be

inevitably dealt in their present, despite attaining a ‘universal’ age of experience and maturity. Memory, in both of the selected texts, then is not only a medium of narrative assisted by the given author, but becomes the principal centre of their gender, and identity, for it is their ‘histories’ intertwined with the social milieu, that formulates their ‘self’. What horrifies is not, therefore, a paranormal entity, and is merely the records of history that haunt, disturb, and traumatize their conflicted present.

**KEYWORDS** : Gender, History, Identity, Memory, Politics

## INTRODUCTION

“They swarm inside me,  
Inconsistent as a storm of bees,  
Clatter, across my thoughts  
Dragging their future with them  
And their million deaths,  
Setting down their histories

On the threshold of my tolerance” (Imitiaz Dharker)

Memory – the mental perception of human experience – is timeless, spaceless. It has no past, and no future; it has been there, stationed in the individual sub-conscious, only to stir chaos in the present. Sprouting from an experienced

impression that is long lost in the histories of time, it only paves the grounds for the ensuing actions to take place. The 21<sup>st</sup> century, at its emerging frontiers, after having examined, through multiple theories and applications, the exteriors of culture and literature, now, turns its army towards the interiors of human experience. A psycho-analytical reading is what emphasizes the scrutiny of memories to understand what a certain specific character does, and why it does what it does, but an extension to this reading, lies parallel, the idea of memory, being the chief reason that dictates the identity of an individual; that intertwines with the personal and the collective historicity, to formulate its self, as well as the other.

Indian English, or Indian Writing in English, as a dialect that branches from the main canon of the colonizers' language, apparently reiterates, along its journey, the spirit of Caliban's words. Although, not attempting to curse in the literal sense, yet the Colonial literature, produced by the Indian soil forged on surface the unseen depths of British Raj. Quite intriguingly, the 'nationalistic' approach was perceived from a common, domestic space of Indian living, equally emphasizing and reflecting upon the loops of the native society and politics. M.K. Naik in *A History of Indian English Literature*, discussing the influence of the Gandhian whirlwind from 1920-1947 writes, "The Indian English novel of the period was deeply influenced by the epoch-making political, social and ideological ferment caused by the Gandhian movement" (Naik 160). In the

same chapter, the scholar continues, “The work of K.S Venkatramani, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao would not perhaps have been possible had the miracle that was Gandhi, not occurred during this period. In fact, it was during this age that Indian English fiction discovered some of its most compelling themes; the ordeal of the freedom struggle, East-West relationship, the communal problem and the plight of untouchables, the landless poor, the downtrodden, the economically exploited and the oppressed” (Naik 124). And the strain to highlight the intricacies of the collective society of the self, was henceforth, continued by the trends that follow – by Arundhati Roy, and as well, Salman Rushdie – the trend, not to incorporate the present turn of events with a mix of social rhetorics, but to look at the said history of events to perceive the root cause of gender and identity.

Upon a general examination of the selected texts, Rushdie and Roy, appear to probe into two absolutely ‘different’ province of historiography; one, attempting to base the enigmatic ventures of the members of the Midnight’s Conference Club on the structure of the Nation’s political unrest at its boundaries, and the other pervades through the social rubric of touchability, untouchability, and Communism in a small part of a big nation. Yet, a closer glance reveals not only a diverging argument, that is, the political becoming the reason of personal, but moreover, a converging stance that, if comprehended, does not make these texts ‘different’ any more. Recollecting the emotions in a state of agony,

memory becomes a significant ‘binocular’ through which the critical reader witnesses the Blakean journey of innocence to experience of Saleem Sinai and Rahel-Estha Ipe. What appears, however, quite intriguing is the fact that memory, at this juncture, then is analyzed more than a mere narrative strategy that assists an emphasized attention of the reader on the events that ‘traumatizes’ the narrator. Memory – the mental perception of experience, which is timeless and spaceless – assembles in fragments to formulate the conscious of the individual, its self, its identity, its gender.

Both of the experienced narrators begin their respective tales of innocence at the given age of thirty-one, constantly oscillating between familial histories, collective trauma, and present-day personal circumstance. What begins on an unambiguous, intricate note of relocating real Bombay, and fictional Ayemenem, both “handcuffed to history”, and not just Saleem, culminates with pertinent questions that do not end with the narrative. The 1969 Rahel-Estha are different from the 1993 ones; and Saleem, despite of not being the genetic product of Aadam Aziz, yet resembles him, and names his own son as Aadam Sinai. Aadam, the very nomenclature evokes in the mind of a critical reader, as a harbinger of ancestry – the known most old generational patriarch. It is through Aadam, Amina, and Saleem that the narrative not only traverses through what Franz Roh understood as ‘magic realism’, but also illustrates the spine-chilling history of the contemporary India – from the

heydays of Gandhian maxims, Rowlatt Act, Jallianwala Bagh tragedy, 1947 Partition, 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, to Dhaka invasion, and state of Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi government – covering almost four generations of Aziz's lineage which was apparently continued not by a son, but by his daughter, the mother of Saleem.

*God of Small Things*, when perceived as a parallel to Rushdie's most acclaimed text, does not take into consideration a national history that collectively determines the four generations of a domestic family, torn in between identities and revolutions. Rather, as mentioned previously, it plays with a small part of a nation with 'bigger' things. Partition had affected the boundaries of India, but it is Untouchability, Communism and Love-Laws, that have infected the interiors of the developing nation, much to an extent that a fictional locale of Ayemenem becomes to every Indian, a microcosm of the macrocosm one breathes in. The three generations here, of Mammachi-Baby Kochamma, Ammu-Velutha, and Rahel-Estha, experiences, not the horrors of division of borders, but the horrors of the division of self. This is what memory does – it infiltrates the past, haunts the present, and destabilizes the future. The memory of being an Indian becomes a complication for a medical practitioner like Aadam who has spent nearly five years in the German atmosphere, mingling with companions similar to that of Oskar and Ilse Lubin, with an ideology that India would cease to exist, had Vasco da Gama not discovered it. What appears intriguing is that the conflict in identity arises when a self has lived in two

opposing worlds, but for Rahel-Estha, the self appears to be distorted from the very beginning, at multiple levels. Let alone their national identity, the “monozygotic twins” were put to trial and repeated condemnation on the basis of their religious identities – they being half-Hindu and half-Christians; on the basis of their Mother’s place in the social strata – Ammu being divorced from a man of other religion; on the basis of their gender indirectly – it was Estha being returned to his father and Rahel had to be with her mother, and therefore the twins were separated. This separation was the most tragic part of the entire narrative, as the twins who are spiritually understood as ‘one self’ were distorted like constituents, never to be a whole self again.

The pulsating time frame of past and present in the selected texts, as one reads, perhaps, is not only an experiment challenging the conventional linear narrative, but to underscore the presence of the past in the form of history and trauma in the present day of the narrator. The river in both of the case, be it through the ferryman Tai, who claims to “have watched the mountains being born; have seen emperors die”, or through the boat through which Rahel-Estha-Sophie Mol escape their home, and Ammu transgresses with Velutha – becomes the conjoining point of the diverging histories. Bombay is a metropolitan centre which shakes irrevocably during the Partition. Ayemenem is a settlement pushed towards the margins of the southernmost state of the Nation. Saleem was born at midnight on the exact date of Indian Independence, and

Rahel-Estha was born in the middle of a journey on the road. Saleem's world was at a great distance from that of Rahel-Estha, yet in both of their respective realms, their personal history bespoke a collective trauma of many; their past constantly haunting their present, horrifying and thereby complicating their identities, and in a way, bringing on surface the inherited histories of gender.

### **HOW 'HISTORIES' MANIPULATE THE 'SELF'?**

Homi K. Bhabha in the Introduction to *The Location of Culture* evaluates that, "The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize the cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (Bhabha 2). To understand the 'self' of the grown-up narrators in the given texts, not only does the critical eye need to ponder upon their respective memories of innocence in the horrifying kaleidoscope of history, but also do one need to consider the very beginning of their distorted self much prior to their birth. Saleem Sinai is the embodiment of a cultural conjunction of India and England equally, as it is of the two prominent religious sects of the South-Asian subcontinent; of the two contrasting economic strata; of the two elements that conform the text to the idea of magic realism; and, of the two frames of time. However, much before Saleem's birth as a blemish of the English exploitation of the Indian

native woman unfurls, the self's distortion paves its way through the history of Saleem – the history of Aziz, the history of Naseem, the history of Amina, the history of Ahmed. Although, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, has no blood associated kin with the mentioned names, yet, being handcuffed to history of the pan-India, also makes him handcuffed to the history of a family he was nurtured into. Saleem's history was linked with Shiva's history, and both of their histories were, in a sense, can be assumed to be linked with Mary Pereira's history.

History is anything that is past, documented officially, and preserved till timelessness. Herein lies the most horrifying aspect of it – what is past cannot be present tangibly, but it does determine it undeniably and that in a way it puts to trial at times the true essence of a self. Aziz was at crossroads of his German experience and the Indian self; Naseem was in a flux with the 'modern' demands of her husband and the traditional values she beheld; Amina's self was pitted against her older self of Mumtaz and her equation with Nadir; Ahmed was torn between the English customs and his own masculine ideals. Gender and its equation with history will be taken into consideration in a later discussion, but what becomes clear by now is the connection of history and identity that is bridged by experience. And all this is recollected by the grown-up Saleem, not as a mere record of what has happened, but how he remembers what had happened – preserving for his

son (which is Shiva's son), Aadam Sinai. Saleem in this context says to Padma;

“My son will understand. I'm telling my story for him, so that afterwards, when I've lost my struggle against cracks, he will know, morality, judgement, character...it all starts with memory...and I am keeping carbons. I told you the truth, memory's truth because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, alters, exaggerates, minimizes, glorifies, and vilifies also, but in the end, its heterogeneous and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own” (Rushdie 124).

This was a case of personal history, where the 'self' at its most basic level was constantly challenged by forces of external colonialism. Saleem was not present when the mentioned names of his relations were caught up in a cultural conflict; he was not conscious of Mary Pereira's action of exchanging him with Shiva; the tale of his birth at the brink on Indian Independence was not a part of his own memory – he, perhaps, had listened to it from his elders, as Rahel-Estha had from their Mother of their birth in the middle of a bus journey, and then had reflected upon its significance. But what his innocent memories had, were the endeavours of the mystical children of Nature that tried to mend the fissures the adult politics presumably failed. The horrors of the conflicted 'self', the horrors of liberation of one 'self', the horrors of partitioned territories, the horrors of political invasion, and the horrors of protecting the 'self' from those against it is on one side, and the horrors of

innocent children being agitated and traumatized on the other side intensifies the gravity of the then historical event/s.

While Saleem appeared to be aware of his own external happenings and internal transformations, as he begins to understand the political unrest that dwells in India and how his mind is a forum through which the ‘specially-powered’ children communicate the proceedings of what they call the Midnight’s Conference Club, Rahel and Estha, individually and collectively, took twenty-three years to understand how the tragedies had happened when they had happened. Similar to how Saleem was a distortion of England and India, of rich and poor, and indirectly, of India-Pakistan, the monozygotic twins were, by their birth, half-Hindu and half-Christian. And, immediately with their birth they were tied to the social history at the margins of the subcontinent; and, to the personal histories of Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Ammu, Chacko and with special regard to Sophie Mol –

“It is curious how sometimes the memory of death lives on for so much longer than the memory of life that it purloined. Over the years as the memory of Sophie Mol slowly faded, the loss of Sophie Mol grew robust and alive. It was always there. Like a fruit in the season. Every season. As permanent as a Government job. It ushered Rahel through childhood into womanhood” (Roy 16).

By the end of *Midnight’s Children*, the metaphorical distortion of the self of Saleem which was caught between his Indian vis-à-vis Pakistani self, caused partially to

Amina's migration to the other country and by the 'memory' loss of Saleem before his joining of the Pakistan army, came to stand by its literal meaning – disintegrating into millions of specks of dust. In *God of Small Things*, Rahel-Estha are not India. They are ordinary children wrapped in the histories of communism, religion, and human equations. All they desire for is 'love', which appears to be at a losing side with the arrival of the 'cultured' Sophie Mol. Estha, having been traumatized by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, in a frenzy to feel secure attempts to run away from home; Rahel and Sophie-Mol accompanies him, and the three innocent children sail across the river in a boat to the History House, to Velutha. In the process, Sophie Mol is drowned and is dead, as the critical reader understands. The two children go near Velutha, only to find him being beaten to brutal bruises in a short while. In the next scene they are manipulated by Baby Kochamma, who herself was torn between her traditional self and the love of Father Mulligan to save Ammu; to claim Velutha as their kidnapper; the claim the god of small things as the perpetuator of big things.

It was only Velutha who loved the children sufficiently – his lie of his true identity as one of the flag-bearers in the strike of the Worker's union and manifesting in the innocent minds the image of his twin Urumban, to he, treating the fantasies of the children as real people – it speaks all of Velutha. What appears quite intriguing that where for Rahel-Estha, it was the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man that had fuelled in them the real smell of

trauma, their real history that smelt to them like “old roses” were steered by the affair of Ammu and Velutha, one being a Hindu divorcee from a Christian husband, and the other being an Untouchable in the raging land of Communism. The death of Sophie Mol had everlasting impressions on the innocent minds of Rahel-Estha – Margaret, Chacko, Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, all of the family members from which the twins craved for love and affection blamed Esthappen and Ammu for the tragedy. Framing an untouchable was considered to be pragmatic to that family which already had its own psychological histories, than to put question on their own repute. This had started to disintegrate the crumbling self of Rahel-Estha.

Freud in the analysis of repetitive-compulsion, death instinct and traumatic neurosis in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* writes, “We describe as *traumatic* any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on the large scale in the functioning of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure” (Freud 23). The physical exploitation of Estha and the loss of Sophie had indeed circumscribed the already-distorted minds of the two seven year olds. Adding to it, in their minds, Ammu’s words constantly rang – “If it weren’t you I would be free. I should have dumped you in an orphanage the day you were born. You’re the millstones round my neck” (Roy 291). Perhaps, the cumulative effect of all the

unfurled tragedy had culminated into Estha's muteness and the awkward silence between the two inseparable twins. And it was here while recollecting the events of the history house across the river that they had actually realized that there was no Urumban in the real sense, and that the silence from Sophie Mol amidst the rising waves was the moment she had left only her memories. The 'self' of Rahel-Estha were here forth, completely destroyed into perpetuating incompleteness – be it for Estha who was returned to find his identity to an urban school in Calcutta, and was re-returned when his father was to migrate to the foreign land, or for Rahel who pursued her studies in Architecture in Delhi, and migrated to the States with her husband Larry. They were never complete.

Ayemenem was never out from Rahel-Estha, as Kashmir was never out of Saleem. Velutha's struggle with his Untouchability, inhabiting the History House which was rumoured to be haunted by the ghost of Kairi Saipu had a long play in the history of Ayemenem. When Rahel had returned from the States back to her native place to meet her brother to feel complete, there was an unsaid quietness that marked a great upheaval in the past sunny days of the natives. The History house was converted to a museum, there in one corner was a watch Rahel found of her with 'stopped time', and a photograph of her cousin and sibling that had captured a frozen moment. Everyone was living in the past – a past that began with the Velutha's arrest and ended with a political march. The rise of Communism, which was even witnessed in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry*

*Tide* that connected the Morichjhapi massacre was the one for the Labour Laws and Love Laws in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Velutha was not able to assert his self, and the moment he began to assert, he was killed, and Ammu was bereaved of the god of small things, she dreamt of happily, only in her what the kids call, the afternoon-mare; unlike the dream of Saleem which proved to be true, the dream of the widow.

Benedict Anderson in the Introduction to *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origin and the Spread of Nationalism* proposes the psycho-social construct of a nation as 'imagined'. Quoting him, he says: "It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each, lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 6). Saleem's head striking the literal spittoon which could represent the Old India metaphorically amidst the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965, not only strips of his memory of his previous life, but also strips him off his Indian identity that was already at conflict with the memories of Kashmir. In a scene much prior to the ravages of the same war, the critical reader witnesses Saleem being 'helpless' of his relocation to Pakistan and his inability to communicate with the members of the Midnight's Conference Club. He assumes that perhaps, it was only in the other side of the boundary that he could facilitate most of his telepathic powers. The Dacca invasion is another instance that reveals the suspension of Saleem amidst the

horizons of memory and identity, and how despite being unconsciously clinged to the previous identity, he will be treated no less than a prisoner of war in the same imagined community, the fate of which was handcuffed to his, well evident from the words he uttered during his imprisonment under the plight of the Emergency and the sterilization program;

The curse of vanishment, dear children, has evidently leaked into you. No, as to the question of guilt, I refuse absolutely to take the larger view; we are too close to what-is-happening, perspective is impossible, later perhaps analysts will say why and wherefore, will adduce underlying economic trends and political developments, but right now we're too close to the cinema-screen, the picture is breaking up into dots, only subjective judgments are possible. We should have avoided it, I should never have dreamed of purpose, I am coming to the conclusion that privacy, the small individual lives of men, are preferable to all this inflated macrocosmic activity" (Roy 254).

The geographical space therefore, stands as a principal criterion that articulates one of the many constituents of a 'self', one being gender, obviously. Psychoanalytical linguistics offers one another – language. Rita Kothari's *Chutneyfying English; The Phenomenon of Hinglish* elaborates on the term coined by Rushdie 'chutnification' that also directly hints at the notion of Bhabha's cultural hybridity and the third space. The amalgamation of Malayalam and English by Roy, and of Hindi, Urdu and

English by Rushdie literally evinces the clash of two cultures and the friction of two identities, suspended, left to fight with the developed self, and the challenged self.

### **DEFYING THE 'HISTORIES' OF GENDER**

In the above discussion, one sees how the self culminates when the many, fragmented memories conjoin. And memories are perceptions of experience. With the dissemination of Saleem's memories, his identity was confined to being an 'old buddha'; and it was with the restoration of those memories that he understood what has befallen him. Had Rahel-Estha could remove their memories, their lives could be on a better note despite the tragedy, but it was the unexplicated memory of the twins, and of the collective society of Ayemenem that had witnessed the political revolution based on Velutha's innocent death, that their identities were in suspension. In both the cases, the critical reader witnesses the idea of 'preservation' as the most significant aspect in dealing with histories; both of the narratives hanker back to the mythical lore of the Mahabharata that not only contextualized an internal war in an imagined community, but also speak of preserving the histories as they preserve the pickle jars. However, what appears intriguing is the fact that although, both Rushdie and Roy attempt to 'preserve' histories that dictate the 'self' of its narrators, yet that also attempt to disrupt the 'tradition' that dictates the genders of their characters.

Judith Butler in the seminal work *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, while substantiating the theory of gender performativity, metaphysics of substance and essentialist feminism, contemplates, “If there is something right in Beauvoir’s claim that one is not born but rather becomes a woman, it follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing, that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is open to intervention and resignification” (Butler 43). In both of the selected texts, the critical reader not only witnesses the subversion of the patriarchal dictums that has been perpetuating since histories unknown, but had also recognized a movement in the process of being a woman, being in the male-centric sphere, yet asserting her agency as and when required.

“Maybe a boy does need a baba” (Roy 31) – iterating these words, the female guardian, who promised to love the twins ‘double’, had to return Estha to his father in Calcutta. What was meant for benefitting the pillars of patriarchy, the father-son relationship, perhaps could be interpreted as one of the significant reason of Estha’s ‘mute’ defense mechanism as a response to his childhood trauma. The interaction of the young boy with the Orangedrink Lemondrink man; and his distance from the figures of love and affection, Ammu and Rahel, had intensified his spirit to the extent that he was himself drained of his own authority and masculinity. The twins, therefore, are not only a contrast to their respective biological sexes, but also

approach to their gender differently. Estha, unlike a true patriarch, does not pose his agency in the decisions of his life. He is sexually abused without his consent; he is blamed for his cousin's death without being able to express his fear; he is returned to his father and separated from his twin sister without his consent; and again he is re–returned back to Ayemenem without his approval. All one could hear from the character was how he had the “ability to blend himself into the background of wherever he was”, how he “occupied a very little space in the world” (Roy 10).

Rahel, on the other hand, chooses to express herself. Although a large chunk of the narrative is perceived through an omniscient narrator, but a certain section of it takes into consideration what Rahel had internalized all along the years from 1969 to 1993. Having completed her education at Delhi, it is Rahel who shares the void she felt in the absence of her twin, even when she was with her husband. A divorcee now in 1993 when she has returned to Ayemenem to meet her brother, Rahel appears to express her voice, her self, her emotions, if not control the unfurling circumstances. Ammu, too does the same. According to the perpetuating ‘histories’ that determine the gendered norms, a woman does not have an authority over her own life. It is a man who decides, imposes and dictates a woman's life, socially, physically, and culturally. This is more evident in Rushdie's illustration of the marital association of Aziz–Naseem, who is later in the narrative, addressed as Reverend Mother, Ahmed–Amina, and

Saleem–Padma–Parvati. The masculine figures do try to suppress the voice of their feminine counterparts; yet, these women still carve themselves from the ‘historical’ framework of gender into becoming a new woman in the corpus of Indian English literature.

Mammachi, in this context, although was the original thought behind setting up Paradise Pickles and Preserves, yet, belonging to the ‘histories’ of generational oppression, she too had inherited in her routine the same gendered notions that differentiated Ammu from Chacko; Ammu from Velutha. Having herself ‘habituated’ to the bruises of Pappachi till the end of his life, she had not approved of Ammu’s decision to be divorced from her husband. Ammu’s younger version, before being the mother of the twins, only to escape from her authoritarian father, desperately enters into a compromised wedlock, in an act of rebellion with a Christian man. When her husband trades her to his senior colleague to protect his own job, Ammu along with the leaves ‘slams the door’ of the domestic life like Ibsen’s Nora, and starts her life fresh in Ayemenem. This is not the last transgression as a woman of Rahel-Estha’s mother. Her relation with Velutha, and her legal assertion at the local police station to Inspector Thomas Matthew was the last recorded in the memories of the two-egg twins, before she died at a “diable viable” age of thirty-one.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* explicates, “Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern

subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effected. The question is not of female participation in insurgency, or the ground rules sexual division of labor, for both of which there is ‘evidence.’ It is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (Spivak). Velutha’s innocence was the foundation on which Comrade Pillai triggered a political revolution in the margins of Kerala. The Marxist ideologies that were formulated to diminish, and moreover, eradicate the economic fissures of the capitalist society became a forum of double standards, and personal ambition; be it for Chacko, as witnessed from his temperament during the strike of the Workers’ union; or, be it for Pillai who refused to aid Velutha in the legality of the crime he was accused of. Velutha’s struggle cannot be ignored, but Ammu’s engagement with the male-dominated world even at the periphery can also be not left unnoticed. One needs to remember that this text is a debut of a female author, and as Elaine Showalter argues in *A Literature of Their Own* that a cultural perspective in feminist criticism can only be endowed by realizing and acknowledging the diversity of women’s experience across ethnicity, class, and history.

Therefore, it wouldn’t be incorrect to assert Ammu as a rebel, defying the histories of perpetuating gender dictates,

and envisioning of being a woman in a process. Where Ammu's defiance, however, was outward and overt, Amina – the mother of a single son, was disguised and covert. A brief glance over her history reveals that the defiance from her gendered role was not the only apparent voice raised against the traditional society. Naseem's overwhelming silence that was intrusive and awkward, unlike that of Estha, on the whole idea of Nadir Khan's marriage with Mumtaz was the transformative breakthrough. The epidemic of optimism ended with Abdullah's assassination, but what thereafter began was a significant clash of the two opposing genders. The national identity was undeniably in question, but with this clash in the domestic sphere, the self of a 'gender' was at trial in the court of tradition and perpetuating history. Nadir's identity as a masculine figure was repeatedly questioned by Reverend Mother, from his escape, to his hiding at Aziz's place, to his secret marriage with Mumtaz, to his fear of being caught, to his coercive divorce to Mumtaz. Aziz's daughter had no control over the circumstance, neither over her divorce, nor over her marriage with Ahmed, in which she accepted the new identity assigned to her by her new provider – as Amina.

Powerless to forget Nadir, Amina with her new identity struggled with her older version, Mumtaz. Ahmed's dominance was not taken devotedly by his wife, despite, she trying her best to love him. The power dynamics at the domestic level intensified to such an extent that Amina did not share the prophecy predicted for her unborn child to its father and her husband. Her leaving Bombay and relocating

herself along with Jamila, and Saleem to Pakistan, and then coming back to tend her alcoholic and abusive husband back to Bombay complicates her position in a critical predicament. At this juncture, Reverend Mother's defiance is more overt in comparison to her daughter. Standing true to the traditional image of a woman, and not changing herself according to the 'modern' demands of Aziz who burnt her veil, and then in the course of the Book 3, beginning to work in a petrol station, all of these suggests that the past of a gendered society was infiltrating their present, but these women, unlike their male counterparts, did not kneel down to what the winds of history carried, rather they confronted them with all their powers and carved a new identity with new ideologies of gender.

Similar to how Mammachi's family history was preserved in her enterprise of pickles, Saleem's family history was also preserved through the pickles of Mary Pereira. Padma, a self-dependent female companion of Saleem who is unknown of Saleem's family history is the eye through which the critical reader sees the past, present and future of Saleem Sinai. It is through her that we see Aadam's nose being defined as an emblem of a true patriarch, how Naseem-Aziz would fight over the religious tutors, how Amina was oscillating between Nadir, Qasim and Ahmed through the phone calls, and most significantly, how Saleem married Parvati, changed her name to Laylah, and gave his name to the child of Shiva and Parvati, and how the woman widow aimed to destroy the children of

Midnight. It is through Padma who despite being an independent woman chose to stay with the disintegrating Saleem till his end, that we hear Saleem accepting;

“Slowly Padma uncoils, as I continue: 'Women have made me; and also unmade. From Reverend Mother to the Widow, and even beyond, I have been at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my opinion!) gentler sex. It is, perhaps, a matter of connection: is not Mother India, Bharat-Mata, commonly thought of as female? And, as you know, there's no escape from her. There have been thirty-two years, in this story, during which I remained unborn; soon, I may complete thirty-one years of my own. For sixty-three years, before and after midnight, women have done their best; and also, I'm bound to say, their worst” (Rushdie 236).

**WORKS CITED**

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities; Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 2006.
- Bhabha, Homi.K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble; Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge, 2002.
- Dharker, Imitiiaz. "The Mark". Indian Poetry in English: The Problematic of Identity and Representation, *Indian Writing In English; Critical Appraisal*, Edited by Amar Nath Prasad, Sarup and Sons, 2005.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated and Edited by James Strachey, W.W, Norton and Company, 1961.
- Naik, M.K. *A History of Indian English Literature*, Sahitya Akademi, 2023.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*, Penguin Books, 1997.
- Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*, Internet Archive, 1981.  
<https://archive.org/details/MidnightsChildren/page/n1/mode/2up>
- Spivak, G. C. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by C. Nelson and L. Grossberg. Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

# **Gender Difference in Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour: An Achievement Perspective**

**Ms. Sreeparna Chowdhury**

Assistant Professor

Shri Shikshayatan College

## **Abstract**

The present study was designed to investigate the gender differences in academic help-seeking behaviour. The difference between the male and female students in academic help-seeking was also examined in the light of students' prior achievement. Through random sampling technique 465 higher secondary students were chosen from the schools located in and around Kolkata, West Bengal, India. Academic Help-Seeking Scale (AHSS), an instrument developed by the author and a General Information Schedule collecting students' demographic information were used to draw data from students. Results showed that male and female students significantly differed in their academic help-seeking behaviour and they also differed according to their prior academic achievement levels. The authors concluded that gender causes difference in students' academic help-seeking behaviour and it can be modified and

enhanced by abolishing gender stereotyping. Relevant paths for future researches were also highlighted.

**Keywords:** *academic help-seeking behaviour, academic achievement, gender, male, female*

## **Introduction**

Gender is a social construct and not a biological one to distinguish men and women. A gender is defined by a variety of factors, such as, the nature of duties, responsibilities and roles allocated to the men and women in a community. In 2011, the Food and Drug Administration of US (FDA) clearly distinguished the concept of sex and gender when they used the term sex as a biological idea and gender as self-representation of an individual to classify male and female (Food and Drug Administration, 2014). Therefore, the definition of gender encompasses a number of concepts, such as, the concept of biological sex, sex-based social functions or gender roles in society, gender identity etc.

Over the span of advancement of the human culture, social bigotry, deprivation and disparity have become an inseparable component of the society particularly in terms of sex. In sustaining and increasing gender inequality, education acted as an important organization since the ancient times. In 1951, the male literacy rate in India was 27.16% while the female literacy rate was only 8.86%. In 2011 the male literacy rate rose to 82.14% while the female literacy rate was 65.46% (Chutia, 2013). This data quite

clearly demonstrate the prevalent disparity in literacy between males and females in the society. Additionally, the enrolment proportion of male and female students at various school stages also depicts the same image (Chutia, 2013).

Nonetheless, a few interesting changes have been noticed over the last few years. It is seen that in contrast with females, males are lagging behind in academics and females are performing better in terms of academic achievement compared to males in different examinations (Duckworth & Seligman, 2006). In addition, females demonstrate better study skills over males. To explain this growing disparities between the sexes in educational outcomes, we need to recognize the factors causing this discrepancy (Sax, 2008). Study skills, ability and competency, time management, self-efficacy, stress and anxiety are some variables that contribute to academic achievement (Köseoglu, 2015; Rana & Mahmood, 2010; Sevari & Kandy, 2011; Shetty & Srinivasan, 2014). Besides, seeking help for an academic difficulty also plays a significant role in academic performance (Karabanick & Newman, 2011).

Past works related to gender and academic help-seeking yielded blended outcomes. Alexitch (2002), Roussel, Elliot, and Feltman (2011), Simon (2010), and Taplin, Yum, Jegede, Fan, and Chan (2001) in their investigations found that females are more likely to ask others for assistance while considering help-seeking as more advantageous and less

threatening than females (Rosas, 2013), males were more hesitant to seek help (Domene, Shapka, & Keating, 2006; Ryan, Patrick & Shim, 2005). Gender also determines students' choice of the sources to seek assistance (Oberman, 2000). On the contrary, Gill and Kansal (2016), Williams and Takaku (2011), Marrs, Brammer, and Sigler (2012), Muola, Maithya, and Mwinzi (2011), Ahmed and Khanam (2014) and Yang, Taylor, and Cao (2016), found no influence of gender on students' help-seeking behaviour. Both male and females equally looked for low level of assistance (Muola et al., 2011). In a different study, sex-role was noted to have a significant impact on academic help-seeking. Marrs et al., (2012) noted that androgynous usually look for more help.

### **Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour**

According to Nelson-Le Gall (1981, 1985), help-seeking is a plan of action applied by successful independent learners. Help-seeking is no more considered as a dependency on others to resolve a problem rather, viewed as an apparatus of problem solving utilizing others. This reframing of compelled researchers to view help-seeking from a positive achievement and action oriented perspective. Ames and Lau (1982) viewed help-seeking as an achievement behavior which includes the quest for and employment of a strategy to get success. Some of the latest investigations on academic help seeking also portrayed help seeking as a positive attribute of the successful learners (Karabenick, 2004; Makara & Karabenick, 2013; Roussel et al., 2011).

Students who identify a need for help and effectively look for help from their companions, educators, or institutional support services are supposed to be participating in the procedure of help seeking (Karabenick & Newman, 2011). The basic idea of finding help requires a person who has a need that can be fulfilled by someone else's assistance. When a person is introduced to new information or circumstances, a disagreement with the established information is created and then, the person looks for the ways to fix the disagreement (Fittler, 2016). Help-seeking happens when the person try to overcome this disagreement by finding support from the others rather than from the autonomous self (Fittler, 2016).

### **Purpose of the Study**

Academic help-seeking behaviour is a concept that has been largely under-explored in relation to gender differences in academic attainment. Therefore, it may prove useful for a deeper understanding of male and female students' academic problems. The findings of the earlier literature are conflicting; hence, the connection between the gender and academic help-seeking needs further examination. Comparative researches on different academic help-seeking constructs between male and females are limited in number which confines our knowledge about the gender role in academic help-seeking. Whether and how academic help-seeking acts significantly in establishing a difference between the male and female students' academic achievement, would be a fascinating area to be explored by

the researchers. Taking into account the well-established fact that males are more reluctant to seek help for mental health problems (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Chang, 2007) it can be assumed that males may show hesitance in seeking assistance in an academic setting as well and if so, it is intriguing to analyze what this would be in case of the male and females of different academic attainment levels. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the gender differences in the academic help seeking behavior of the students along with an intention to get an idea about how the prior achievement factors relate to these gender differences. Accordingly, the following objectives and hypotheses were formed:

### **Objectives**

1. To investigate whether there is any significant difference in the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students.
2. To investigate whether there is any significant difference in the academic help-seeking behaviour of the high and low achievers with respect to their gender (Male and Female).
3. To investigate whether there is any significant difference in the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students with respect to their academic achievement level (High and Low Achievers).

### **Hypotheses**

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There will be no significant difference between the

academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the high and low achievers with respect to their gender (Male and Female).

**H<sub>03</sub>:** There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students with respect to their academic achievement level (High and Low Achievers).

### **Methodology**

The present study was conducted on a sample of 465 students aged approximately between 15 and 18. The eleventh grade higher secondary students studying under different govt. and govt. aided schools composed the sample of this study. The data were collected from the schools located in and around Kolkata, India. Both male ( $n = 262$ ) and female ( $n = 203$ ) students were chosen as sample. The initial sample size was of 601 students. Applying the Mean $\pm$ SD technique the data were categorized according to academic achievement levels. Finally, a sample of 465 students consisting  $n = 218$  low and  $n = 247$  high achievers were retained.

### **Tools Used in the study**

In order to collect data, following instruments were used:

### **General Information Schedule (GIS).**

A General Information Schedule comprized of students' demographic information was developed.

### **Academic Help–Seeking Scale (AHSS).**

Student's academic help-seeking behavior was measured by the Bengali translated version (following Blind Translation method) of Academic Help–Seeking Scale (AHSS), a 17-item self-report questionnaire developed by the author. It has five dimensions. The dimensions Perceived Benefit of Academic Help–Seeking (PBAHS) and Perceived Threat of Academic Help–Seeking (PTAHS) were created to measure students' attitude towards academic help-seeking while the other three dimensions, namely, Instrumental Academic Help–Seeking (IAHS), Executive Academic Help–Seeking (EAHS) and Avoidance of Academic Help–Seeking (AVAHS) measure the strategies used by the students to seek academic help. The cronbach alpha reliabilities for this sample were .45 (PBAHS), .49 (PTAHS), .44 (IAHS), .29 (EAHS) and .50 (AVAHS). The validity coefficient of the dimensions of AHSS varied from .56 to .77 (PBAHS), .55 to .70 (PTAHS), .66 to .73 (IAHS), .57 to .72 (EAHS) and .56 to .78 (AVAHS).

### **Result and Interpretation**

To verify the null hypotheses of the study with respect to the related objectives, several *t*-tests were performed.

**Verification of First Hypothesis**

**Objective 1:** To investigate whether there is any significant difference in the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students.

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students.

To verify  $H_{01}$  with respect to the *first objective*, independent samples  $t$ -tests were conducted to determine if there were significant differences between the *male* and *female* students on the five dimensions of Academic Help-Seeking Scale (AHSS) measuring academic help-seeking behaviour.

Table 1

*Distribution of Mean, SD, t values, Degree of Freedom and p values of Academic Help-Seeking Scale Dimension Scores With Respect to Male (n = 262) and Females (n = 203)*

Dimensions	Category	M	SD	t value	df	p
PBAHS	Male	11.79	1.98	-	463	.920
	Female	11.90	1.96	0.56		
PTAHS	Male	8.50	2.69	-	463	.365
	Female	8.67	2.85	0.64		
IAHS	Male	11.28	2.17	0.12*	463	.032
	Female	11.26	1.93			
EAHS	Male	6.37	2.73	3.13*	463	.013
	Female	5.62	2.29			
AVAHS	Male	8.09	3.03	-	463	.400
	Female	8.27	2.83	0.67		

*Note.* PBAHS = Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking; PTAHS = Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking; IAHS = Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking; EAHS = Executive Academic Help-Seeking; AVAHS = Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking.

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*  $p < .05$ .

The results of the *t*-tests (see Table 1) indicated significant mean differences between *male* and *female* students on two dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(463) = 0.12, p < .05$  and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(463) = 3.13, p < .05$ .

*Males* were found to have higher mean values than their *female* counterparts in the dimensions 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 11.28 > Female: 11.26) and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 6.37 > Female: 5.62) whereas, *females* had higher mean values than the *males* in rest of the three dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 11.90 > Male: 11.79), 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 8.67 > Male: 8.50) and 'Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 8.27 > Male: 8.09).

Therefore, the hypothesis ( $H_01$ ) that 'There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students' was rejected and thus the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a1$ ) that 'There will be a significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students' was partially accepted.

### **Verification of Second Hypothesis**

**Objective 2:** To investigate whether there is any significant difference in the academic help-seeking behaviour of the high and low achievers with respect to their gender (Male

and Female).

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the high and low achievers with respect to their gender (Male and Female).

To verify *H<sub>02</sub>* with respect to the *second objective*, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there was any significant difference between the male and female *high achievers* and also between the male and female *low achievers* on the five dimensions of Academic Help-Seeking Scale (AHSS), measuring academic help-seeking behaviour.

Table 2  
Distribution of Mean, SD, *t* values, Degree of Freedom and *p* values of Academic Help-Seeking Scale (AHSS) Dimension Scores of the High & Low Achievers With Respect to Their Gender (N = 463)

Dimensions	Gender	Achievement Groups									
		Male (n = 262)			High Achievers (n = 247)			Low Achievers (n = 218)			
		M	SD	<i>t</i> value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	M	SD	<i>t</i> value	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
PBAHS	Male	11.99	2.00	2.52*	245	.012	11.21	1.84	-3.46**	216	.001
	Female	11.19	2.18				12.14	1.83			
PTAHS	Male	7.82	2.41	3.05**	245	.003	10.49	2.47	2.93**	216	.004
	Female	6.69	2.20				9.35	2.73			
IAHS	Male	11.63	2.16	-1.28	245	.201	10.24	1.87	-2.70**	216	.007
	Female	12.00	1.88				10.98	1.87			
EAHS	Male	5.76	2.54	3.17**	245	.002	8.13	2.51	6.20**	216	.000
	Female	4.56	1.95				5.99	2.29			
AVAHS	Male	8.19	3.12	1.06	245	.292	7.81	2.74	-1.71	216	.080
	Female	7.67	3.17				8.48	2.88			

Note: PBAHS = Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking; PTAHS = Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking; IAHS = Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking; EAHS = Executive Academic Help-Seeking; AVAHS = Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking.

\*\* *p* < .01, \* *p* < .05.

The results of the *t*-tests indicated significant mean differences between *high achiever male* and *females* on the three dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(245) = 2.52, p < .05$ , 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(245) = 3.05, p < .01$  and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(245) = 3.17, p < .01$  (see Table 2).

Significant mean differences were also found between *low achiever male* and *females* on the four dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(216) = -3.46, p < .01$ , 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(216) = 2.93, p < .01$ , 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(216) = -2.70, p < .01$  and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(216) = 6.20, p < .01$  (see Table 2).

In case of the *High achievers*, *males* were found to have higher mean values than the *females* on four dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 11.99 > Female: 11.19), 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 7.82 > Female: 6.69) and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 5.76 > Female: 4.56) and 'Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 8.19 > Female: 7.67), whereas, *females* have higher mean value than the *males* on the dimension 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 12.06 > Male: 11.63) of AHSS (see Table 2).

In case of the *Low achievers*, *males* were found to have higher mean values than the *females* on two dimensions of

AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 10.49 > Female: 9.35) and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking' (Male: 8.13 > Female: 5.99), whereas, *females* have higher mean values than the *males* on the dimensions 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 12.14 > Male: 11.21), 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 10.98 > Male: 10.24) and 'Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking' (Female: 8.48 > Male: 7.81) of AHSS (see Table 2).

Results of the *t*-tests indicated significant differences in scores between the high and low achievers with respect to gender on four dimensions of Academic Help-Seeking Scale, namely, Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking, Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking, Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking and Executive Academic Help-Seeking except for the dimension Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking. Therefore, the hypothesis ( $H_02$ ) that 'There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the high and low achievers with respect to their gender (Male and Female)' was rejected and thus the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a2$ ) that 'There will be a significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the high and low achievers with respect to their gender (Male and Female)', was partially accepted.

### **Verification of Third Hypothesis**

**Objective 3:** To investigate whether there is any significant difference in the academic help-seeking behaviour of the

male and female students with respect to their academic achievement level (High and Low Achievers).

**H<sub>03</sub>**: There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students with respect to their academic achievement level (High and Low Achievers).

To verify *H<sub>03</sub>* with respect to the *third objective*, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if there was any significant difference between the *male* high and low achievers and also between the *female* high and low achievers on the five dimensions of Academic Help-Seeking Scale (AHSS), measuring academic help-seeking behaviour.

Table 3  
Distribution of Mean, SD, *t* values, Degree of Freedom and *p* values of Academic Help-Seeking Scale (AHSS) Dimension Scores of the Male & Female Students With Respect to their Academic Achievement (N = 465)

Dimensions	Academic Achievement Groups		Gender									
	High (n = 247)	Low (n = 218)	Male (n = 262)					Female (n = 203)				
			M	SD	<i>t</i> value	df	<i>p</i>	M	SD	<i>t</i> value	df	<i>p</i>
PBAHS	High	11.99	2.00	2.83**	260	.005	11.19	2.18	-	201	.003	
	Low	11.21	1.84				12.14	1.83				3.06**
PTAHS	High	7.82	2.41	-	260	.000	6.69	2.20	-	201	.000	
	Low	10.49	2.47				7.78**	9.35				2.73
IAHS	High	11.63	2.16	4.72**	260	.000	12.06	1.88	-	201	.000	
	Low	10.24	1.87				10.98	1.87				3.58**
EAHS	High	5.76	2.54	-	260	.000	4.56	1.95	-	201	.000	
	Low	8.13	2.51				6.62**	5.99				2.29
AVAHS	High	8.19	3.12	0.89	260	.372	7.67	3.17	-	201	.075	
	Low	7.81	2.74				8.48	2.68				-1.79

Note. PBAHS = Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking; PTAHS = Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking; IAHS = Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking; EAHS = Executive Academic Help-Seeking; AVAHS = Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking; High = High Achievers; Low = Low Achievers.

\*\* *p* < .01. \* *p* < .05.

The results of the  $t$ -tests indicated existence of significant mean differences between the *high and low achiever males* on the four dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(260) = 2.83, p < .01$ , 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(260) = -7.78, p < .01$ , 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(260) = 4.72, p < .01$  and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(260) = -6.62, p < .01$  (see Table 3).

Significant mean differences were also found between the *high and low achiever females* on the same four dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(201) = -3.06, p < .01$ , 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(201) = -6.34, p < .01$ , 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(201) = 3.58, p < .01$  and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking'  $t(201) = -4.03, p < .01$  (see Table 3).

In case of the *males, high achievers* were found to have higher mean values than the *low achievers* on three dimensions of AHSS, namely, 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking' (High: 11.99 > Low: 11.21), 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking' (High: 11.63 > Low: 10.24) and 'Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking' (High: 8.19 > Low: 7.81), whereas, *low achievers* have higher mean values than the *high achievers* on the dimensions 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking' (Low: 10.49 > High: 7.82) and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking' (Low: 8.13 > High: 5.76) of AHSS (see Table 3).

In case of the *females, high achievers* were found to have higher mean value than the *low achievers* on the dimension 'Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking' (High: 12.06 > Low: 10.98) of AHSS whereas, *low achievers* have higher mean values than the *high achievers* on the dimensions 'Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking' (Low: 12.14 > High: 11.19), 'Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking' (Low: 9.35 > High: 6.69) and 'Executive Academic Help-Seeking' (Low: 5.99 > High: 4.56), and 'Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking' (Low: 8.48 > High: 7.67) of AHSS (see Table 3).

Results of the *t*-tests indicated significant differences in scores between the male and female students with respect to their academic achievement levels on all four dimensions of Academic Help-Seeking Scale, namely, Perceived Benefit of Academic Help-Seeking, Perceived Threat of Academic Help-Seeking, Instrumental Academic Help-Seeking and Executive Academic Help-Seeking except for the dimension Avoidance of Academic Help-Seeking. Therefore, the hypothesis ( $H_03$ ) that 'There will be no significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students with respect to their academic achievement level (High and Low Achievers)' was rejected and thus the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a3$ ) that 'There will be a significant difference between the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students with respect to their academic achievement level (High and Low Achievers)', was partially accepted.

## **Discussion**

From this investigation it was seen that male and females have significantly different Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour. It was also observed that male high and low achievers as well as the female high and low achievers significantly differed in some of the constructs of Academic Help-Seeking Behaviour. Such difference between the male and females was also noted in some previous researches (Alexitch, 2002; Chunlin, 2013; Domene et al., 2006; Roussel et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2005; Simon, 2010).

The results of the present research also showed that, females possess more positive as well as negative attitude towards academic help-seeking than their male counterparts. Also, females are more likely to adopt the avoidant strategies of academic help-seeking whereas, males are more likely to adopt both dependent and independent strategies of academic help-seeking.

Such findings differ from the results of the previous investigations which showed that, male are typically more hesitant to seek support from others than females (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Chang, 2007; Rosas, 2013). Nevertheless, Chunlin (2013) noticed a contrary tendency in his research and found that females were more hesitant in seeking support than the males. Only Olsson (2002) noticed that direct help is all the more regularly used by the males, particularly in conditions where they are requesting help from a more powerful individual.

Females are predominantly more sociable, deep and serious learners, devoted workers, better coordinators and organizers of study, give additional time in learning, and study with more energy and effort than the males (Charles-Ogan, 2015). Additionally, females usually do not apply unfair means to complete a task like males. As a result, females follow the path of more in-depth knowledge gain and can therefore, develop a positive outlook towards help-seeking behavior. At the same time, females are less self-efficacious, ambitious, competitive and aspirant than the males and also have more fear of failure (Dreber, von Essen & Ranehill, 2009; Nelson, Newman, McDaniel, & Buboltz, 2013; Reis, 1991; van Vianen & Keizer, 1996). They are also more afraid of humiliation and face loss than the males (Else-Quest, Higgins, Allison, & Morton, 2012; Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000). Such negative attitude may sometimes cause them to interpret academic help-seeking as a threat lead them towards avoidance of help-seeking and also may offer the explanations for males' greater academic help-seeking in both instrumental and executive form.

The findings of this study indicated that students' level of achievement had an effect on the academic help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students. Likewise, in their attitude towards academic help-seeking (i.e. perceived benefits and threat) and in their use of strategies (both instrumental and executive) of academic help-seeking, the male high and low achievers along with the female high and low achievers substantially differed. Females, regardless of

their achievement level demonstrated both positive and negative academic help-seeking behavior in the current research. Prior achievement level too influenced the academic-help-seeking behaviour of the male and female students.

It was also observed that both male and female students with high prior achievement, used adaptive instrumental strategy of academic help-seeking more than the male and females with low academic achievement. Besides, low academic achievement, rather than high academic achievement resulted in a more negative attitude towards academic help-seeking (i.e. perceived threat) and a more dependent academic help-seeking style (i.e. executive) in both male and female students. From these findings, it can be inferred that high achievement to some degree yields appropriate academic help-seeking behaviour among both male and female students whereas low achievement generally yields inappropriate academic help-seeking behaviour among them.

Supports for these findings can be extracted from an earlier study which observed that high and low achieving females varied in their academic help-seeking behaviour (Taplin et al., 2001). Previous investigations also indicated that the high achievers appear to have better study patterns (Kovach, Fleming, & Wilgosh, 2001; Rao, Moely, & Sachs, 2000), disposition (McCoach & Siegle, 2001), learning techniques (Montemayor, Aplatén, Mendoza, & Perey, 2009) and high on the need achievement (Jabeen &

Khan, 2013). Such positive qualities certainly would build up a more appropriate academic help-seeking behaviour in both male and females. Low achievers, on the other hand, are generally characterized by aloofness, bluntness, low cognitive abilities, escaping and, dependent tendencies, low self-esteem, indecision, lack of commitment and responsibility, and uncoordinated study habits (Khatoon, 1988; Kosnin, 2007; Vanderstoep, Pintrich, & Fagerlin, 1996). They also lack any clear objective or desire to strive or accomplish something (Jabeen & Khan, 2013). Hence, such characteristics of the high achievers might have caused a more appropriate form of academic help-seeking pattern in both male and female students.

### **Conclusions, Suggestions and Future Research Directions**

This study clearly shows that academic help-seeking surely assumes a contributing role in students' learning and accomplishment. The results will give the instructors and the policymakers a superior understanding of the courses through which academic help-seeking behaviour of different groups of achievers can be modified according to gender. Gender stereotyping in help-seeking also need to be removed as it limits their decision making processes in help seeking. Females have to be advised on how to conquer shyness or the feeling of humiliation in order to improve their desire for support-seeking and compel male students to socialize more. Females must be guided on how to overcome shyness or feeling of embarrassment so that

their seeking of help could be increased and male students must be compelled mingle more with others in social situations. The role of masculine beliefs in males also need to be revised.

Future studies are required to examine the gender impacts on academic help-seeking behaviour of the students of various school stages, academic streams, cultures, habitat, age, social and financial background etc. and of course on the students with special needs. In order to obtain a deeper understanding of the causes and obstacles associated with the decision-making process, more study using heterogeneous samples is needed to help pursue actions in males and females who display inappropriate aid-seeking behaviour. How the apparent gender role influences students' academic help-seeking behaviour, particularly of the high and low achievers, must be investigated. Likewise, how students' gender will influence their quest for support from formal and informal sources need to be researched. Additionally, comparative studies across country are also needed. Studies must also be conducted to see the mediating role of help-seeking attitudes in gender-specific determination of dependent or independent help-seeking behaviours among the learners. How the instructors' gender impacts upon academic help-seeking actions of the students can be another intriguing territory of exploration.

**Delimitation of the Study**

This research was done exclusively with the govt. and govt. aided higher secondary school students of West Bengal, India. Also the study saw gender difference only drawing samples from male and females and didn't consider the transgenders. Besides, the study was conducted comparing the high and low achievers and didn't incorporate the moderate achievers.

## References

- Addis, M. E., & Mahalik, J. R. (2003). Men, masculinity, and the contexts of help seeking. *American Psychologist*, *58*(1), 5-14. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.58.1.5
- Ahmed, O., & Khanam, M. (2014). Learning resources management strategies and academic achievement of secondary school students. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *2*(1), 108-115. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.675.3401&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Alexitch, L. R. (2002). The role of help-seeking attitudes and tendencies in students' preferences for academic advising. *Journal of College Student Development*, *43*(1), 5-19. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2002-17954-001>
- Ames, R., & Lau, S. (1982). An attributional analysis of student help-seeking in academic settings. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *74*(3), 414-423. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.74.3.414
- Chang, H. (2007). Psychological distress and help-seeking among Taiwanese college students: Role of gender and student status. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, *35*(3), 347-355. doi:10.1080/03069880701418789
- Charles-Ogan, G. (2015). Gender influences on study habits of mathematics students' achievement. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, *3*(7), 24-28.

Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ec78/d5c0915a783ef56b445b175967fd937abcd6.pdf>

- Chunlin, Y. (2013). How Sex Differences Affect Chinese Minority Preparatory College Students' English Acquisition. *Linguistics, Culture & Education*, 2(2013-1), 175-189.
- Chutia, M. K. (2013). *Gender difference on academic achievement in CBSE 10th class examination in greater Guwahati a study* (Doctoral dissertation, Gauhati University, Assam, India). Retrieved from <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/28287>
- Domene, J. F., Shapka, J. D., & Keating, D. P. (2006). Educational and career-related help-seeking in high school: An exploration of students' choices. *Canadian Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy*, 40(3), 145-159. Retrieved from <https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/article/view/58780/44265>
- Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. (2006). Self-discipline gives girls the edge: Gender in self-discipline, grades, and achievement test scores. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98(1), 198-208. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.98.1.198
- Else-Quest, N. M., Higgins, A., Allison, C., & Morton, L. C. (2012). Gender differences in self-conscious emotional experience: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138(5), 947. doi:10.1037/a0027930

- Fittner, P. R. (2016). *Academic help seeking constructs and group differences: An examination of first-year university students* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nevada). Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.unr.edu/bitstream/handle/11714/2140/Fittner\\_unr\\_0139D\\_12002.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://scholarworks.unr.edu/bitstream/handle/11714/2140/Fittner_unr_0139D_12002.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)
- Food and Drug Administration. (2014). *Evaluation of sex-specific data in medical device clinical studies—Guidance for industry and food and drug administration staff*. Rockville, Maryland, United States: Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Retrieved from <https://www.fda.gov/media/82005/download>
- Gill, H. K., & Kansal, A. K. (2016). Resource management strategies in relation to achievement and gender among secondary school students. *International Journal of Advances in Science Engineering and Technology*, 4(2), 56–61. Retrieved from [http://www.ijar.in/journal/journal\\_file/journal\\_pdf/6-250-146466892656-61.pdf](http://www.ijar.in/journal/journal_file/journal_pdf/6-250-146466892656-61.pdf)
- Jabeen, S., & Khan, M. A. (2013). A study on need achievement of high and low achievers. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(4), 225–235. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/ea91/7837b97dcc7759b9247047cf12340c9dfb75.pdf>
- Karabenick, S. A. (2004). Perceived achievement goal structure and college student help-seeking. *Journal of Educational*

*Psychology*, 96, 569–581. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.96.3.569

Karabenick, S. A., & Newman, R. S. (Eds.). (2011). *Help seeking in academic settings: Goals, groups, and contexts*. New York, USA: Routledge.

Khatoun, J. (1988). Personality patterns of high and low academic achievers: A psychological study of adolescents of Rohilkhand region Uttar Pradesh. In M. B. Buch (Ed.), *Fifth Survey of Educational Research* (Vol. 2). New Delhi: NCERT.

Köseoglu, Y. (2015). Self-efficacy and academic achievement—A case from Turkey. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(29), 131–141. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/b6f1/e6c10a9e16d1f143bf649651c040eb447ae8.pdf>

Kosnin, A. M. (2007). Self-regulated learning and academic achievement in Malaysian undergraduates. *International Education Journal*, 8(1), 221–228. Retrieved from <https://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education/iej/articles/v8n1/v8n1.pdf#page=227>

Kovach, K., Fleming, D., & Wilgosh, L. (2001). The relationship between study skills and conceptions of intelligence for high school students. *The International Journal of Creativity & Problem Solving*, 11(1), 39–49. Retrieved from <http://www.dbpia.co.kr/Journal/articleDetail?nodeId=NODE01045463#none>

- Makara, K. & Karabenick, S. (2013). Characterizing sources of academic help in the age of expanding educational technology: A new conceptual framework. In Karabenick, S., M. Puustinen (Eds.), *Advances in help-seeking research and applications: The role of emerging technologies* (pp. 37-72). Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Marrs, H., Sigler, E. A., & Brammer, R. D. (2012). Gender, masculinity, femininity, and help seeking in college. *Masculinities & Social Change*, 1(3), 267-292. doi: 10.4471/mcs.2012.16
- McCoach, D. B., & Siegle, D. (2001). A comparison of high achievers' and low achievers' attitudes, perceptions, and motivations. *Academic Exchange*, 2, 71-76. Retrieved from [https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/35131917/A\\_comperison\\_of\\_high\\_achievers\\_and\\_low\\_achievers\\_attitude\\_perceptions\\_and\\_motivations\\_McCoach.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DA\\_comperison\\_of\\_high\\_achievers\\_and\\_low.pdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A%2F20200215%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4\\_request&X-Amz-Date=20200215T082105Z&X-Amz-Expires=3600&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=4e1e91ce6ccece7b55d2ce59c8df2c0ef3d014735778b36b7eceb07835514723](https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/35131917/A_comperison_of_high_achievers_and_low_achievers_attitude_perceptions_and_motivations_McCoach.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DA_comperison_of_high_achievers_and_low.pdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A%2F20200215%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20200215T082105Z&X-Amz-Expires=3600&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=4e1e91ce6ccece7b55d2ce59c8df2c0ef3d014735778b36b7eceb07835514723)

- Montemayor, E., Aplatén, M. C., Mendoza, G. C., & Perey, G. M. (2009). Learning styles of high and low academic achieving freshman teacher education students: an application of the Dunn and Dunn's learning style model. *University of the Cordilleras, 1*(4), 58-71. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.683.8557&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Muola, J. M., Maithya, R., & Mwinzi, A. M. (2011). The effect of academic advising on academic performance of university students in Kenyan universities. *African Research Review, 5*(5), 332-345. doi:10.4314/afirrev.v5i5.26
- Nelson, K. L., Newman, D. N., McDaniel, J. R., & Buboltz, W. C. (2013). Gender differences in fear of failure amongst engineering students. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3*(16), 10-16. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a968/1823a56657d43de1d2afb2d968ac97909d2c.pdf>
- Nelson-Le Gall, S. (1981). Help-seeking: An understudied problem-solving skill in children. *Developmental Review, 1*(3), 224-246. doi:10.1016/0273-2297(81)90019-8
- Nelson-Le Gall, S. (1985). Help-seeking behavior in learning. *Review of Research in Education, 12*(1), 55-90. doi:10.2307/1167146

- Oberman, P. S. (2000, April). *Academic help seeking and peer interactions of high school girls in computer science classes*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. Retrieved from <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/fc55/0eb0d08b7ee414b971696ee52e1cd2be458e.pdf>
- Olsson, I. (2002). *Help-seeking and causal attributions for helping* (Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University). Retrieved from <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:161334/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Plant, E. A., Hyde, J. S., Keltner, D., & Devine, P. G. (2000). The gender stereotyping of emotions. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 24*, 81–92. doi:10.1111/j.1471-6402.2000.tb01024.x
- Rana, R. A., & Mahmood, N. (2010). The relationship between test anxiety and academic achievement. *Bulletin of Education and Research, 32*(2), 63–74. Retrieved from <https://vulms.vu.edu.pk/Courses/EDU705/Downloads/Article%20Assignment%201,%20Spring%202018.pdf>
- Rao, N., Moely, B. E., & Sachs, J. (2000). Motivational beliefs, study strategies, and mathematics attainment in high- and low-achieving Chinese secondary school students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*(3), 287–316. doi:10.1006/ceps.1999.1003
- Reis, S. M. (1991). The need for clarification in research designed to examine gender differences in achievement

- and accomplishment. *Roeper Review*, 13(4), 193–198. doi:10.1080/02783199109553357
- Rosas, J. S. (2013). Academic help-seeking, social academic self-efficacy and class-related emotions in university students. *Revista de la Asociación Argentina de Ciencias del Comportamiento*, 5(1), 35–41. Retrieved from <https://revistas.unc.edu.ar/index.php/racc/article/view/5158/5323>
- Roussel, P., Elliot, A. J., & Feltman, R. (2011). The influence of achievement goals and social goals on help-seeking from peers in an academic context. *Learning and Instruction*, 21(3), 394–402. doi:10.1016/j.learninstruc.2010.05.003
- Ryan, A. M., Patrick, H., & Shim, S. O. (2005). Differential profiles of students identified by their teacher as having avoidant, appropriate, or dependent help-seeking tendencies in the classroom. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(2), 275–285. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.97.2.275
- Sax, L. J. (2008). *The gender gap in college: Maximizing the developmental potential of women and men*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Sevari, K., & Kandy, M. (2011). Time management skills impact on self-efficacy and academic performance. *Journal of American Science*, 7(12), 720–726. Retrieved from [http://www.jofamericanscience.org/journals/am-sci/am0712/093\\_7696am0712\\_720\\_726.pdf](http://www.jofamericanscience.org/journals/am-sci/am0712/093_7696am0712_720_726.pdf)

- Shetty, S. S., & Srinivasan, S. R. (2014). Effectiveness of study skills on academic performance of dental students. *Journal of Education and Ethics in Dentistry*, 4(1), 28–31. Retrieved from [http://www.jeed.in/temp/JEducEthicsDent4128-7675087\\_211910.pdf](http://www.jeed.in/temp/JEducEthicsDent4128-7675087_211910.pdf)
- Simon, P. (2010). *Gender differences in how help-seeking attitudes mediate the effect of academic competence on Latino youth's academic help-seeking* (Master's thesis, Rutgers University). Retrieved from <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/30439/pdf/1/>
- Dreber, A., von Essen, E., & Ranehill, E. (2009). *Outrunning the gender gap—boys and girls compete equally* (SSE/EFI Working Paper Series in Economics and Finance, No: 709). Stockholm, Sweden: Stockholm School of Economics, The Economic Research Institute (EFI). Retrieved from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/56335/1/591456281.pdf>
- Taplin, M., Yum, J., Jegede, O., Fan, R. Y., & Chan, M. S. (2001). Help-seeking strategies used by high-achieving and low-achieving distance education students. *Journal of Distance Education*, 16(1), 56–69. Retrieved from <http://www.ijede.ca/index.php/jde/article/view/173/130>
- Vanderstoep, S. W., Pintrich, P. R., & Fagerlin, A. (1996). Disciplinary differences in self-regulated learning in

- college students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21(4), 345-362. doi:10.1006/ceps.1996.0026
- Van Vianen, A. E., & Keizer, W. A. (1996). Gender differences in managerial intention. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 3(2), 103-114. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0432.1996.tb00051.x
- Williams, J. D., & Takaku, S. (2011). Gender, writing self-efficacy, and help seeking. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, 1(3), 46-54. Retrieved from [http://www.ijbhtnet.com/journals/Vol\\_1\\_No\\_3\\_November\\_2011/5.pdf](http://www.ijbhtnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_3_November_2011/5.pdf)
- Yang, Y., Taylor, J., & Cao, L. (2016). The 3 x 2 Achievement Goal Model in predicting online student test anxiety and help-seeking. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education*, 32(1), 1-16. Retrieved from <http://ijede.ca/index.php/jde/article/view/914/1627>

# **Men Written by Women : Exploring The Impact of Feminism on Men's Activism in Indian Cinematic Space**

**Sristi Sharma**

M.A. English, Semester – IV  
Shri Shikshayatan College

**Smt. Baidehi Mukherjee**

Assistant Professor and P.G. Co-Ordinator  
Department of English  
Shri Shikshayatan College

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to explore the multifaceted representations of men in narratives shaped by women and to decode how such narratives framed by feminist perspectives evolve the idea of masculinity, patriarchal norms and power structures, focusing on Indian female film directors painting their male characters with their feminine colours. It also seeks to explore how these representations intersect with feminist theory and masculinity studies, in the contexts of post colonialism, socio-cultural variations and literary analysis. It examines how feminist thoughts have influenced the construction of male characters, challenging traditional notions and archetypes, and redefining masculinity, vulnerability and complexities of contemporary gender

dynamics in the Indian cinematic space particularly through the works of prominent Indian screen-writers like Juhi Chaturvedi, Kiran Rao, Zoya Akhtar and Meghna Gulzar. This paper aims to illustrate the diverse ways in which women directors navigate the dynamic discourse of gender, delving into how gender dynamics are represented and negotiated within their creative canvas, and how these representations contribute to a wider scope for gender equality.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Male Activism, Masculinity, Feminist Theory, Cinema, Direction

## INTRODUCTION

“The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own.”

(Friedan 365)

The Indian cinema embodies a faithful mirror which acts as a powerful medium to reflect social realities, leaving room for open-ended conversations and interpretations that compel the spectators to question and draw conclusions that often contribute to a social shift impacting the whole generation. It brings together diverse thoughts and perceptions, erasing regional and demographical boundaries, and unifying human minds to coincide at a point. However, these interpretations often differ on critical and gendered outlooks and pave ways for either

coordination or controversy. In a society like India where patriarchy has been a driving force in framing the social model, impacting every household, the female entities have been pushed to the periphery. Their roles have been restricted within the four walls and the Indian cinema functions as a key contributor to this convention. Since cinema began its journey, it has come across several revolutions and transformations. This is the industry that has popularized the image of *angry young man* and at the same time, has represented the *abla naari* who conforms to patriarchal expectations during the early decades of its popularization. This phase of the Indian cinema saw women being objectified by the camera but alienated by the plot. Such a notion was broadly brought to light by film-critic Laura Mulvey in her landmark essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) addressing “women (who) then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male order, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.” (Mulvey 804)

### **EMERGENCE OF THE ‘NEW MAN’**

The Indian film industry witnessed major successes of films portraying toxic and abusive masculinity which presently seems more appealing to youths. The massive box-office collections of these films are enough to highlight the tendency of the generation moving away from the simpler

concepts of companionship and compatibility towards a more complicated idea of 'red flags' and 'green flags.' However, this points out to the fact that the one emotion patriarchy values when expressed by men is anger. At this juncture, a handful of female film directors have taken up the advocacy for dismantling patriarchal system and constructing an alternate feminist lens to look at films. "The Female Gaze is more than a camera or a shooting style, it is that empathy generator that says I was there in that room...It uses the frame to share and evoke a feeling of being in feeling, rather than seeing...the emotions are being prioritized over the action." (Soloway) Their diverse works encapsulate their common aim to locate men as well as women in a social space irrespective of traditional norms and gender roles as an attempt to create a more open sphere for all to breathe and not to suppress anyone and their perspective tends to focus on the emotions and feelings that the characters and stories deliver to their audiences. As a progression to feminist theories and movements, they attempt to shift from patriarchal representations, which glorifies one but at the same time suffocates another, to feministic representations, diminishing the claustrophobic spaces and permitting every character to express their mental, emotional and cognitive selves. As Spivak states, "The relationship between women and silence can be plotted by women themselves." (Spivak 28). Therefore, these women, associated with the film industry, have observed the prevailing silences of women as well as men since ages and empathically determined to be a voice for

these silences through their narrative. Employing the big screen as a potent medium to initiate a transition in trend, women directors have succeeded in carrying their idea from scripts to screens and gradually contributing to a much needed social transition. Directors and screen-writers like Meghna Gulzar, Juhi Chaturvedi, Zoya Akhtar and Kiran Rao stands as the flagbearers of this feministic approach, constantly striving to divert from the mainstream male narratives and picturing the new man through their fictional male characterization.

The idea of men written by women is basically associated with the elevation of men who are respectful, courteous and unintimidating by femininity, something that might be shunned by the patriarchs but universally acknowledged. As Bell Hooks in her book *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love* states “We live in a culture where emotionally starved, deprived females are desperately seeking male love.” (Hooks 26). Her book asserts how the patriarchal system has not only suppressed the women but also leaves no room for men to express their emotional self, highlighting the vulnerable aspect impacting both the genders. With regard to this context, the emphasis is laid upon the deep inner misery of men and the terrible terror when one cannot love while at the same time one cannot be loved. The assumption regarding the hardheartedness of men failed to measure the depth of male suffering and thus “it has taken more than 30 years for the voices of visionary feminists to be heard telling the world

the truth about men, women and love.” (Hooks, 27). Following this visionary approach, women screen-writers have extended their reach to cultivate a popular culture of women writing male characters in their creative endeavors, concentrating on how characterization and their representation in films can define the modern canon of male characters written by female writers and the factors that contribute to their popularity on social media among the netizens.

## **JUHI CHATURVEDI**

“In my world of storytelling, women are as important as men. I am not writing films to show one gender down neither am I forcefully writing sympathetic role for women or feminist roles.”

An advertisement professional turned Indian screen-writer, Juhi Chaturvedi, is known to strongly advocate the principle of equality in an unequal society and thus claims to have not been writing films from a gendered lens. *Piku* (2015) encapsulates a world where roles and responsibilities does not rely on gender. The film explores the eccentric relationship between a daughter Piku (Deepika Padukone) and his aging father Bhaskor Banerjee (Amitabh Bachchan) who sets out on a road trip to Kolkata with a taxi driver, Rana Choudhary (Irrfan Khan). Due to its unique blend of humour, emotion and everyday family dynamics, it secures its place as a significant piece of cinema. While breathing life into her characters, Chaturvedi assures to give justified screen time to every character. Bhaskor Banerjee, Piku’s

'feminist father,' is absolutely dependent upon his daughter for financial and emotional support, breaking the age-old pattern of patriarchy and reversing gender roles of daughters as care-giver. He defies the notion of marriage by asserting "Leaving your house after marriage and taking care of others in someone else's house, how foolish? I gave birth to you, *ki naa?* I did not leave you. So now I am your child, you do the same." Through impactful use of dialogues, she brings forth the dichotomy of women's potential and men's vulnerability, and tries to make the spectators aware that "it was never meant to be men versus women. We are having a fight which was never meant to be." Whereas Rana Choudhary, "a character wasn't macho in that sense, but it was a sincere character" who understands Piku's responsibility as a daughter and provides her a comfort space to breathe.

Resembling with another of her written men, Dan (Varun Dhawan) from a collaborative-work with Shoojit Sircar which she recalls as "a stream of consciousness deriving from a deeply personal experience", *October* (2018), who develops a deep bond with Shuili (Banita Sandhu) while she struggles to survive after an accidental fall from a building. As the writer has constructed a sensitive and empathetic Dan to reveal that "what I did what out of kinship, what Dan does is absolutely selfless. I wanted to spotlight the inherent goodness that exists in all of us but one that's revealed in a moment of crisis." He is not a typical hero but a constant companion who nurses her to

health, supplying emotional strength and at the same time teaching that “it’s more important to love than to be loved. And, Shiuli helped him break out from his cocoon and emerge as a beautiful butterfly.” Hence, Chaturvedi convinces her audience that “it is not from a female gaze because I know that such men do exist, who will not make use of an opportunity and pounce on you but will try to build a comfortable space from you.”

### **KIRAN RAO**

Her recent story, *Laapataa Ladies* (2024), which journeyed from OTT platforms to the nominations of Oscars, talks of female agency and resilience in a local rural patriarchal space of India. But at the same time it also highlights the fact that female agency can never be achieved without the support of a man and thus both the genders are codependent on each other and overpowering one gender could lead to gendered hegemonic imbalances in society. She carefully places Deepak (Sparsh Shrivastav) at the position of a loving husband who does not lose hope and sets out to find her lost wife Phool (Nitanshi Goel). He is shown stuck between patriarchal structures that prioritizes male authority and responsibilities of a husband towards his wife. Rao’s directorial style features a blend of sensitivity and depth, capturing the intricacies of human emotions and social dynamics. With a nuanced approach to portray both positive and negative male characters, she states that “while you have a Pradeep character who’s burnt his wife, you still have a Deepak character who may not be the brightest guy

in the room but is deeply in love with his wife and wants to do something for her.” He also helps Jaya (Pratibha Ranta), who wants to pursue higher education in agriculture but lacks support, asserting upon the perfect application of patriarchy. However, in the age of sex discrimination, gender inequality and atrocities, she holds a torch to “positive men surround all of us. People. Men who have held us up. Men who have been supportive.” As she subtly employs satire, she juxtaposes these two kinds of men who seem to be cut from the same cloth but have acquired different social shapes. While Deepak is progressive in thought and action, Pradeep is rooted in medieval values and often projected as bragging about his dowry and threatening the women. Though this movie portrays a compatible man-woman relationship, it also uplifts the women companionship which is well sketched by Rao and depicted by Phool and Jaya, two newly wedded brides who inadvertently get swapped in a train journey due to their veil which acts to eliminate female agency and aspirations which follows a rollercoaster of comical misadventures. As the story unfolds, both Phool and Jaya forge a bond of sisterhood, each empowered to pursue her own aspirations – Phool aims to contribute to her new family while Jaya seeks further education. Such a female companionship resonates with the portrayal of women’s relationship with each other in the works of Victorian era specifically in Charlotte’s Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, the friendship between Jane Eyre and Helen Burns showcases the experiences of hardships that they both faces and the emotional support,

empowerment and validation that women can provide each other. Rao attempts to lift the veil on deep-seated patriarchy and peels off the layers of an unjust society and uncovers the invisibility of women with the lens of her camera. When the paths of these four characters cross, an immediate yet intriguing search for identity and dignity of women begins. Chhaya Kadam (Manju Maai), a single woman who lives alone after ending her abusive marriage, runs a stall at the railway station and provides soil to Phool to plant herself and bloom. If she was taught to not utter her husband's name by the women in her household, it is Manju Maai, who guides her to unlearn this tradition and inspires her to work when she reunites with her husband and thus redefines the true role and responsibilities of a companion irrespective of gender, roles and customs.

### **ZOYA AKHTAR**

A prominent name in the arena of Indian film direction, Zoya Akhtar has been a part of various films that have supplied multiple characters from all spheres of the social strata, struggling to create an identity and build a space for their existence. Akhtar's *Dil Dhadakne Do* (2015) portrays a Delhi-based dysfunctional yet high profile family with the focus on men of all shades within the same family. We find Kamal Mehra (Anil Kapoor), a self-made man obsessed to remain young at heart but counters verbal abuse to his wife, Manav (Rahul Bose), an unwittingly sexist and controlling husband who claims to have "allowed" his wife to work whereas the character of Sunny Gill (Farhan Akhtar) who

questions whether she at all needs his permission to work at the first place. He immediately asserts that by allowing his wife to run a business, he is assuming a position of authority and control, and that is not equality. Akhtar narrates this complicated family dynamic from the eyes of the pet dog of the family, ensuring an unbiased and justified reflection of her art of characterization. The movie revolves around the complexities of family relationships, particularly the relationships between siblings and the consequent family pressure resembling much of Austen's family dynamics. Both the stories explore the social hierarchies of their respective societies, representing the Mehrahs in *Dil Dhadakne Do* as the wealthy elites quite similar to the Bennets in *Pride and Prejudice* as the lower gentry. Looking at a more clearer picture of both the narratives, there is a strong focus upon the challenges of finding love and compatibility within the constraints of social expectations and the emergence of strong female protagonists. Both Ayesha (Priyanka Chopra) and Elizabeth Bennet resemble strong-willed independent and determined women who navigate the complexities of their respective societies. The gender bias in this film is as clear as water as her father shouts his achievements from the rooftops but is unwilling to acknowledge his daughter's. However, she is unwilling to ruffle her parents' feathers at the cost of her own happiness, she seems to need Sunny's appreciation in order to be able to value herself enough to finally ask Manav for a divorce. But Akhtar does not miss to highlight the taboo associated with divorce in an Indian

family as the other women casted in the movie in a same position as Ayesha believe that as long as a husband can provide a good standard of living as is not violent, there should be no problem, a situation that the film mocks of. Therefore, Akhtar challenges traditional gender roles and expectations navigating through career, relationships and family obligations, establishes non-traditional concepts like divorce, romance and financial independency of women and ultimately emphasizes the vitality of self-love and self-acceptance, particularly for women, who are often socialized to prioritize others' needs over their own.

Within the next few years, she takes a step further in her next project, *Made in Heaven* (2019), where she reserves a firm place for the queer group and the day-to-day struggles and mental turmoil they bear just to exist in society. Karan Mehra (Arjun Mathur), a gay man and Meher Chaudhary (Trinetra Halder Gummaraju), a transwoman, both working for the same wedding planner industry, struggles to keep up with their identities and later land into legal troubles as well as societal backlash even for their own people, highlighting the evolving social and legal landscape surrounding LGBTQ+ rights. Exploring the internalized homophobia and the challenges faced while coming out in the open and finding acceptance, both journeys to find love and navigates through multiple relationships just to find validity. It emphasizes upon the idea of “coming out” as a queer person or as a Dalit in the context of this series. This phrase is expected to be perceived as a recurring experience and not a one time declaration. Rather than making one

feel liberated, it can possibly be distressing when it is denied by our loved ones; however, Tara Khanna (Sobhita Dhulipala), a business partner and close friend, remains their constant companion, reflecting upon the significance of companion in a social space and respecting each other's identity, ability and emotions. Akhtar vividly portrays male dominance in Indian culture, irrespective of class or caste. Countless women who played their part in the subsequent episodes share a similar concern about the intangible male control and influences; even the male characters like Karan and Jauhari challenge the conventional notion of masculinity that suppressed not only the women but also the men. Intricate power dynamics within the workplace unfolds between the male and female characters, prompting us to ponder whether the conducive work environment for women is a result of the company's leadership by a woman and a gay man. Kabir, the wedding photographer of the team shoots the memorable glimpses and moments of a marriage, engaging deeply with brides, grooms and their respective families which reveals true views and commentaries behind the pretensions of big-budget weddings. Cinematically, it can be an intentional device employed by the director, giving rise to the filmmaker's anxiety to communicate her thoughts to the audience through a character who resembles her role by being behind the camera. While digging into the approach of filmmaking back then, she notices their women (onscreen) are very strong, all women in their films had agency, even though it

was always male-driven stories but women were strong and impactful since then.

### **MEGHNA GULZAR**

“My choices are based on the strength of the story, not gender.” Her films basically deal with national identity, social crisis and empowerment, irrespective of any gender biasness. She portrays strong female characters along with strong male characters coordinating with each other to co-exist in the social environment. *Raazi* (2018), a spy thriller explores national identity and complexities rooting from partition and its major focus lies on a young Indian woman, Sehmat (Alia Bhatt) who takes her family legacy of dedicating her life to the nation and thus married off into a military family in Pakistan to serve as a spy. Sehmat is ‘raazi’ to shoulder the responsibilities of her ailing father and thus nothing comes before her nation, not even her husband. Despite regional, social, cultural and national differences, her husband Iqbal (Vicky Kaushal) stands not as a rigid man but a supportive husband who makes sure she does not feel alienated in a non-native land and fills her with utmost support, assurance and acceptance. Although she points her gun towards Iqbal when he finally discovers the secret of her mission, Sehmat tries to assure him to trust on her for one last time that she never intended to harm anyone in the family but had accepted the family wholeheartedly and loved him all this while. This particular scene portrays the patriotism of two people in love with each other, for two

different nations, both staged on an equal stage of accountability and duty. As an atonement for taking a couple of lives to sustain the secrecy of her mission, she decides to raise Iqbal's child which reflects the soft emotional side of women even if she affirms to be hard upon herself. Gulzar literally brings a feminine gaze to patriotism, a concept which was always associated with masculinity, courage and resilience. Where women in movies like *LOC-Kargil* and *Border* were just the daughters, mothers and wives who lived praying, weeping and worrying for the valiant man who went out for the sake of national security and warfare, Raazi sets itself apart from this convention. Sehmat asking her training officer whether he thinks she'd be good enough for the mission, shows her determination as well as vulnerability in unusual yet extraordinary circumstances. Her in-laws in Pakistan are portrayed as people with the most humane hearts and the language, landscape and lives on either side of the border are so similar that one naturally starts pondering over the meaninglessness of wars. It is a nuanced approach of the director to humanize individuals irrespective of gendered and national boundaries and inspire to uphold empathy with complexity. A similar man of Gulzar from her film *Chhapaak* (2020), Amol (Vikrant Massey), a social activist and a former journalist who runs an NGO for acid attack survivors stands as a pillar for Laxmi Aggrawal (Deepika Padukone), an acid attack survivor, which raises awareness on the plight of acid attack victims and the consequences. As her burnt skin is fragmentarily reconstructed, it tries to

endure self-love and awareness that is linked to one's appearance. The uplifting promise to surgically reconstruct her ear so that an earring can be worn again, her nose, lips and grafting of the layers of her skin mirrors the layer-by-layer rebuilding of hope and the persistent will to fight for legalities in response to this heinous act. As her face gets a definition, she rediscovers herself which eventually develops her understanding of self and society and her hope seeps back. Amol not only turns out to be a perfect companion for Laxmi but also becomes an inspiration for others like her; the survivors who covered their faces, fearful of the frightened gaze or the disgusting look, now could uncover themselves and their resolves where their skin might be burnt but their spirits remains unburny.

## **CONCLUSION**

“Women have served all these centuries as looking glass possessing the magic and delicious power to reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.” (Woolf 28-29)

Women have long been conditioned to reflect men's ideal image and aspirations, which is not an empowering force but rather a societal expectation that to play a supporting role rather than taking the center stage themselves. But recent years of gendered studies and movements have contributed to transform the scenario, realizing their potential, redefining the conventions and reclaiming their roles. This shift has also been witnesses in the literal and cinematic spaces where several women writers have turned

up with their stories, managing to acquire little spaces within the male narrative. While men portrayed them as passive, women held their pens and portrayed them as supportive, stressing upon the importance of sharing spaces in every sphere. As literature gradually shifted from books to on-stage and later to occupy the screens, the representation of gender witnesses this transition as well, resonating with the contemporary gender dynamics and evolving perspectives of their eras and redefining men and women from a vice versa viewpoint to establish a mutual understanding of co-existence and co-dependence on each other. Focusing primarily upon the Indian cinema, one of the largest and most influential film industries around the globe, a few female film directors like Kiran Rao, Juhi Chaturvedi, Meghna Gulzar and Zoya Akhtar have taken their leads to extend the popular culture of portraying fictional characters in a female-oriented world. They have initially attempted to redefine fictional men in their fictional world as an answer to a question that no one bothered to ask or ponder upon: What women want? A woman wants an encouraging father like Bhaskor Banerjee (Piku), a caring companion like Dan (October), a loving husband like Deepak (Laapataa Ladies), a supportive lover standing with her at her worst like Amol (Chhapaak) and an understanding life partner like Iqbal (Raazi). Thereafter women like Piku, Shuili, Laxmi and Sehmata could flourish and bloom without any constricted patriarchal boundaries. These narratives try to change the picture of the society where men still deserve and women compromise,

threatening to tear apart the fundamental fabric of society. Such a directional approach seeks to instigate the socio-cultural and psychological angle of how one gender perceives the other gender, concentrating upon the revisions of the cultural norms and reestablishing gender roles and order, with an aim for a greater change to reflect upon the society. They bring such men and their stories to the big screen paving way for more such like-minded feminists, irrespective of gender, in the field of direction, to hold the camera and portray the society as a better space for everyone to live with dignity, love and compatibility.

**REFERENCES:**

- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Screen, 1975
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, Columbia University Press, 1988
- Hooks, Bell. *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Love*. Atria Books, 2004
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. W. W. Norton & Company, New York London, 2001
- Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. 1929
- Pathak, Ankur. Interview. *How Chaturvedi's Reality Shaped Her Movies*. Huffpost, 2020
- Chatterjee, Shoma, Interview. *Patriarchy Still Rules ft. Kiran Rao*. The Quint, 2024 Interview with Times Entertainment. *Zoya Akhtar Shares How Early Movies Gave Birth to 'Angry Young Man.'* Times of India. 2023
- Joshi, Namrata. *My Choices are on the Strength of story and not Gender: says director Meghna Gulzar*. The Hindu, 2021

# **The Sinking Edge: Coastal Flooding, Adaptation and Mitigation in Indian Sundarbans**

**Vareeja Ratna, Amrin Khatun**

Geography Honours Batch of 2022–2025

**Smt. Ritubarna Pratihar**

Assistant Professor, Department of Geography

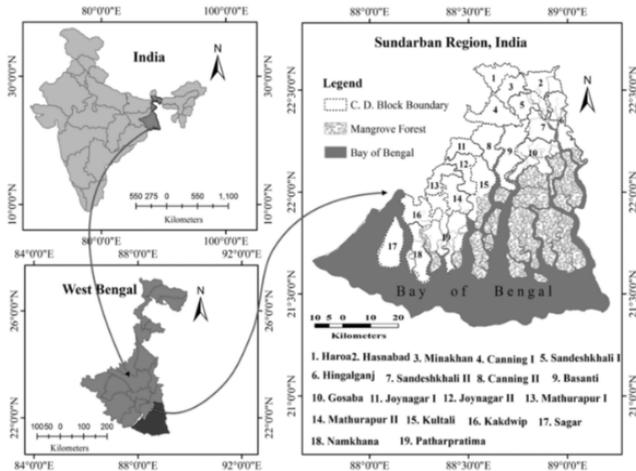
## **ABSTRACT**

The Sundarbans, the world's largest mangrove delta crossing India and Bangladesh, faces increasing threats from coastal flooding caused by intensified cyclones, rising sea levels, and environmental degradation. This study critically explores the socio-ecological impacts of repeated flooding, emphasising livelihood loss, forced migration, mangrove destruction, and saltwater intrusion. Using data from 2004 to 2024, it examines cyclone-induced displacement, the psychological effects of continuous evacuations, and the disproportionate burden on marginalised communities. It evaluates both hard (embankments, elevated infrastructure) and nature-based (mangrove restoration, salt-tolerant crops) adaptation methods, alongside their limitations. The paper critiques top-down planning and advocates for community-led, inclusive, and transboundary resilience approaches. Framed through the perspectives of climate change and intergenerational sustainability, this research highlights the importance of integrated, multidimensional approaches to adaptation to secure the future of this fragile delta.

**Keywords:** coastal flooding, cyclone impact, mangrove degradation, climate adaptation, sea-level rise, saltwater intrusion.

## INTRODUCTION

The Sundarbans is the world's largest mangrove forest, spanning the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna rivers, located on the Bay of Bengal. Located in the southwestern part of the Ganges delta, the Indian portion lies in West Bengal, bordered by South 24 Parganas to the north, Purba Medinipur to the west, the Bay of Bengal to the south, and Bangladesh to the east (**Fig. 1**). Roughly 40% of this nearly 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> forest lies in India; the rest spans across Bangladesh.



**Fig. 1: Location Map**

Crisscrossed by tidal creeks, mudflats, and salt-tolerant vegetation, the Sundarbans is a living example of dynamic

ecological processes. The characteristic tree of the forest is the sundari, from which the name of the forest is derived. [Mukherjee, 2022]

Beyond its ecological wealth, the Sundarbans faces relentless exposure to tropical cyclones, which bring fierce winds, storm surges, and heavy rainfall. These storms often lead to severe coastal flooding, intensified by rising sea levels. Despite this, the mangrove belt acts as a natural shield, protecting nearly 14 million people from devastating impacts. Given its vulnerability, this study explores the intensity, impacts, and mitigation of cyclones and storm surges in the Sundarbans, where nature's beauty and brutality coexist.

## STUDY AREA

The study focuses on the **Indian Sundarbans** in southern **West Bengal**, part of the world's largest contiguous mangrove forest, located in the intertidal deltaic region of the **Ganges, Brahmaputra, and Meghna** rivers. Emphasis is placed on the vulnerable districts of North and South 24 Parganas, prone to coastal flooding, erosion, and land subsidence. Key administrative blocks include:

- **North 24 Parganas:** Hingaljanj, Sandeshkhali I & II, Hasnabad, Minakhan
- **South 24 Parganas:** Canning I & II, Gosaba, Basanti, Kultali, Mathurapur I & II, Joynagar I & II, Kakdwip, Namkhana, Patharpratima, Sagar Island

These areas have faced major environmental changes due to frequent cyclones, salinity intrusion, and land degradation—making them critical for studying climate-induced vulnerability and adaptation.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To assess land loss and environmental degradation in the Sundarbans over the past two decades, focusing on coastal flooding, submergence driven by sea-level rise, salinity intrusion, and repeated cyclonic events.
2. To examine the impact of coastal flooding through cyclones on the physical landscape, mangrove ecosystems, and human settlements, with an emphasis on the socio-economic and psychological vulnerabilities of local communities.
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of adaptation and mitigation strategies, such as embankment construction, mangrove restoration, and climate-resilient livelihoods, in reducing the risks associated with climate-induced coastal hazards.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Secondary data is the data which is already available and is derived from the primary sources and is reprocessed. This study adopts a spatial analytical approach, relying entirely on

authenticated secondary data to examine climate-induced changes in **the Sundarbans, West Bengal**. The study period spans **from 2004 to 2024**. Data were sourced from the NDMA, IPCC, IMD, Census of India, peer-reviewed journals, institutional repositories, and verified news sources.

Spatial and temporal analyses are focused on land loss, mangrove degradation, and socio-economic vulnerability. Geographic data visualisation was performed using QGI. The location map established context, while island submergence and coastal erosion were assessed using satellite imagery and shoreline change data. Cyclone intensity, frequency, and wind speed data were compiled from IMD and NDMA archives. Vulnerability mapping integrates indicators like storm surge zones. Human impact diagrams depicted fatalities, displacement, visualised through proportional scaling. Environmental degradation diagrams highlighted agricultural decline and mangrove loss

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The Sundarbans delta is shaped by sediment deposition from the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna (GBM) river system and tidal erosion. However, upstream dams like the Farakka Barrage have disrupted sediment flow. Rogers, Goodbred and Mondal, 2013 found a 30–40% reduction in sediment supply due to the barrage, leading to erosion rates of 5.5 km<sup>2</sup>/year in the Indian Sundarbans. Hazra et al., 2002

noted sea-level rise at 3.14 mm/year, causing the submergence of Lohachara, Suparibhanga, Bedford, and Kabasgadi by 2000.

Climate change has intensified these impacts. Payo et al., 2016, through numerical modelling, showed that stronger Bay of Bengal cyclones like Amphan (2020) raise storm surges, inundating 15–20% of mangroves annually. Although mangroves buffer floods, Dasgupta, Shaw and Ghosh, 2020 highlighted dieback from salinity intrusion and reduced freshwater inflow, weakening flood protection.

The Sundarbans sustain over 4.5 million people, many dependent on fishing, farming, and honey collection. Ghosh, Hajra and Mukhopadhyay, 2015 found 70% of displaced families migrated to Khulna and Satkhira slums, facing exploitative labour. Mukhopadhyay, 2016 reported 30% loss of cultivable land due to salinity, pushing many into informal jobs.

Gendered vulnerabilities are stark. Rahman, Khan and Sakib, 2018 observed that post-Cyclone Aila (2009), women's mobility dropped by 60%, restricting access to health and markets. Islam and Gnauck, 2009 criticised India's focus on embankments over restoration, worsening drainage. Transboundary collaboration is lacking; Danda et al., 2019 noted India–Bangladesh tensions hinder unified ecosystem management.]

## DISCUSSION

### A. The Role of Mangroves in Flood Protection:

With climate change driving sea-level rise and extreme storm events, coastal zones face growing risks

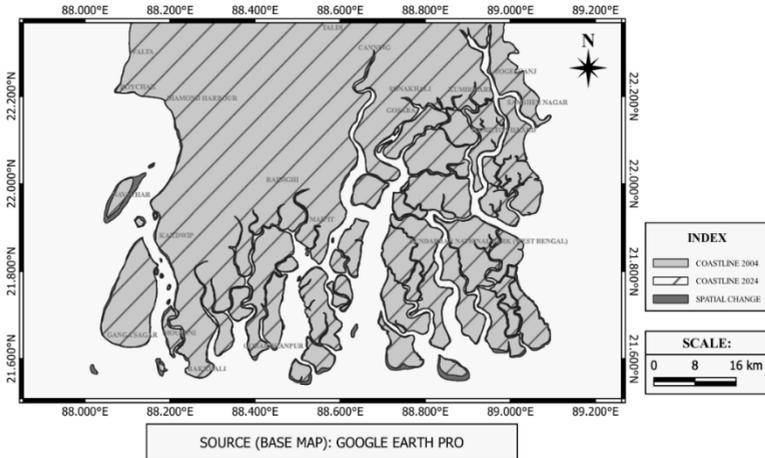


Fig. 2: Spatial change of islands due to coastal flooding (2004-2024)

[Emanuel, 2005; Nicholls & Cazenave, 2010]. Mangroves, located at the land-sea interface, offer critical ecosystem services stabilising sediments, reducing wave energy and wind speed, and mitigating coastal flooding [Das & Crépin, 2013; Guannel et al., 2015; McIvor et al., 2012; Temmerman et al., 2013]. The Sundarbans, the world’s largest mangrove forest and a UNESCO World Heritage Site, plays a vital role in climate resilience. These salt-tolerant trees trap sediments, stabilise shorelines, and slow water flow, helping build and protect land [Alongi, 2008].

In addition to supporting rich biodiversity including endangered species like the Bengal tiger the Sundarbans

serve as a carbon sink, storing carbon in both vegetation and saturated soils [Giri et al., 2015]. This carbon sequestration contributes to climate change mitigation, indirectly reducing future flood risks. GIS mapping (Fig. 2) reveals ongoing coastal submergence from 2004 to 2024, with red zones highlighting areas lost to erosion especially near coastlines and smaller islands. The coastline's retreat signals intensifying erosion likely driven by rising seas and storm impacts.

## B. Key Causes of Coastal Flooding in the Sundarbans:

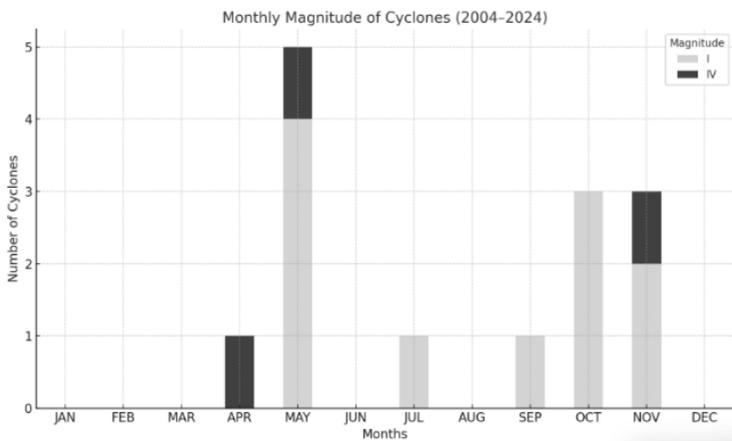


Fig. 3: Monthly Magnitude of cyclones(2004-2024)

Data source: India Metrological Department(IMD)

The Sundarbans, a densely populated delta shared by India and Bangladesh, is increasingly vulnerable to coastal

flooding driven by intense cyclones, rising sea levels, and saltwater intrusion. Over the past two decades, the frequency and severity of cyclonic storms have surged significantly [Singh, 2007; Dasgupta et al., 2010]. The stacked bar diagram (Fig. 3) shows cyclone magnitudes from 2004–2024, with most events occurring between May and November May being the peak. While magnitude I cyclones dominate, higher-magnitude storms like Sidr (2007), Bijli (2009), and Amphan (2020) have caused major devastation [Unnikrishnan et al., 2011].

Wind data from Fig. 4 shows that Sidr reached 220 km/h, while Amphan and Mora crossed 140 km/h, triggering embankment breaches, farmland salinization, and mass displacement [Hazra et al., 2002; Danda et al., 2011]. This also severely impacted biodiversity, including mangroves and species like the Bengal tiger [Gopal & Chauhan, 2006]. Together, these datasets confirm that cyclones and storm surges are the primary causes of flooding in the Sundarbans.

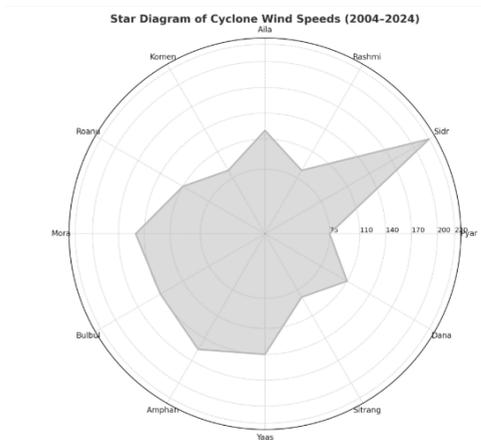


Fig. 4: Star Diagram showing wind speed of cyclones (2004-2024)

Data source: IMD

Climate change further intensifies these hazards. Sea-level rise, increasing cyclone intensity, and altered wind regimes have severely compromised regional resilience. The zonation map (Fig. 5) categorises the Sundarbans into risk zones. Southern islands like Gosaba, Patharpratima, and Sagar fall in the “very high risk” category due to direct exposure to cyclones and saline intrusion. Northern areas like Minakhan face comparatively lower threats.



Fig 5: Vulnerability zonation map

Saltwater intrusion continues to destabilize the Sundarbans. Between 2005 and 2020, dense forest cover declined sharply due to cyclones, salinity, and deforestation, affecting biodiversity, including Bengal tiger habitats. [Times of India, 2021] reported rising human-animal conflicts in areas like Gosaba and Jharkhali due to habitat shrinkage.

Although open and moderately dense forests have expanded likely due to afforestation or natural regeneration this may reduce ecological integrity. A drop in barren land suggests progress in reforestation and community restoration.

However, the expansion of water bodies often results from embankment breaches, especially post-cyclones like Amphan (2020) [Down To Earth, 2020].

These land cover changes have severe consequences. During Cyclone Amphan, storm surges breached embankments in Gosaba, Kultali, and Basanti, causing long-term ecological and social damage.

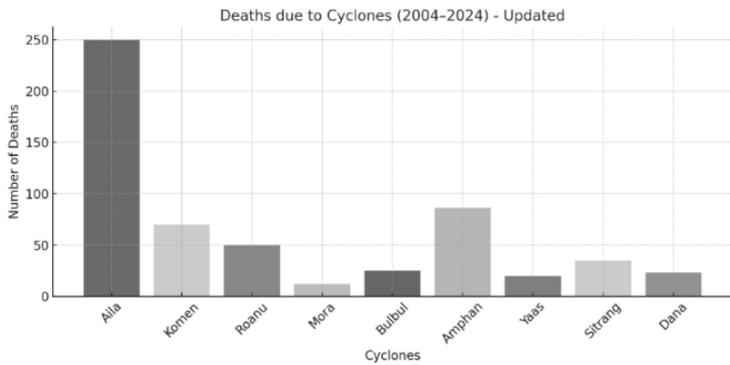
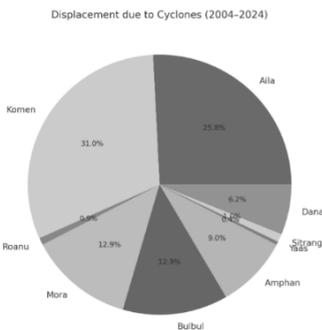


Fig. 6: Deaths due to cyclones (2004-2024)

### C. Impact of Coastal Flooding on Human Communities



Tropical cyclones remain the most destructive hazards in the Bay of Bengal, with the Indian Sundarbans and its 4.4 million residents facing repeated threats from storm surges and saline intrusion (Hazra et al., 2002; Ghosh &

Fig. 7: Displacement due to cyclones

Mistri, 2021). Between 2004 and 2024, cyclones caused significant demographic and socio-economic upheavals, including deaths, displacement, and economic hardship.

**Mortality Trends (Fig. 6):** Cyclone Aila caused the highest fatalities. In contrast, recent cyclones like Amphan and Yaas had lower death tolls due to better early warning and evacuation systems. **Displacement Patterns (Fig. 7):** Aila and Komen together accounted for 63.9% of total displacement over two decades. Weak embankments and low elevation turned short-term evacuations into permanent migration for many.

Cyclone Aila remains the most impactful event, underscoring the acute vulnerability of densely populated, poorly protected coastal regions.

#### D. Impact of Coastal Flooding on the Ecosystem

The Sundarbans ranks among the world's most climate-vulnerable regions.

Erratic monsoons, saline intrusion, and tidal flooding have disrupted traditional livelihoods damaging crops, reducing freshwater access, and fueling food insecurity, migration, and psychological

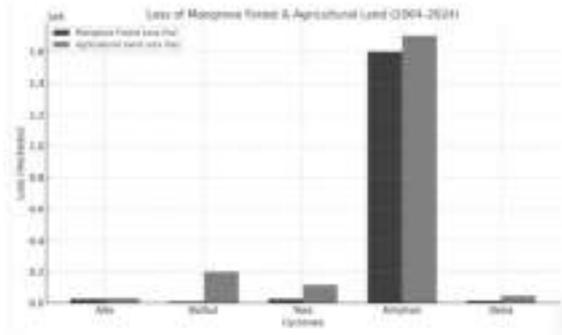


Fig 8: Loss of mangrove forest and agricultural land

stress, particularly among women and youth.

Figure 8 shows cyclone-induced mangrove loss (2004–2024): while Bulbul caused minimal damage (10,000 ha), Amphan destroyed over 1.6 million ha. Aila and Yaas each led to 25,000 ha loss, and Dana another 15,000 ha, weakening the region's natural defences. As *The Hindu* (May 2020) reported, salinity surges post-cyclones rendered farmlands barren, exacerbating food crises. Habitat degradation has displaced endangered species like the Royal Bengal Tiger and Fishing Cat, intensifying human-wildlife conflict.

This degradation creates a vicious cycle: mangrove loss heightens storm surge impacts, leading to further deforestation and salinization. With natural barriers eroding, both ecosystems and communities grow increasingly vulnerable. Urgent action through mangrove restoration, climate-resilient infrastructure, and integrated conservation is essential to secure the Sundarbans' ecological and socio-economic future.

### **E. Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies**

In the densely populated and ecologically fragile Sundarbans, adaptation and mitigation must go hand in hand to safeguard both communities and ecosystems.

#### **Flood Control Measures**

Earthen embankments remain the first line of defence but are prone to breaches due to poor upkeep (World Bank, 2014). Mangrove restoration in areas like Satjelia and

Namkhana post-Amphan has shown success (WWF, 2021). Elevated structures such as cyclone shelters and toilets help reduce flood risks, though marginalised groups often lack access due to land rights issues.

### **Sustainable Development Practices**

Salt-tolerant crops (e.g., Matla, Dudheswar) and integrated farming systems improve resilience. Eco-tourism offers alternative livelihoods and reduces deforestation pressure. Community programs like NCRMP enhance disaster readiness through training and school awareness. However, weak enforcement hinders effective zoning in flood-prone zones.

### **Governance and Global Collaboration**

Initiatives like NCRMP and ICZMP support early warnings, cyclone shelters, and eco-embankments. Global partners like the World Bank, ADB, and UNDP provide crucial support. Community involvement is essential as locals act as both first responders and knowledge carriers.

### **Resilience as a Multi-Dimensional Concept**

Beyond infrastructure, adaptation must address psychological stress, especially adaptation fatigue from repeated rebuilding. Youth face uncertain futures, and inequities related to class, caste, and gender restrict access to resources. Social inclusion is key to true resilience.

## CONCLUSION

The Sundarbans faces critical threats from rising sea levels, increasing salinity, and frequent cyclones all of which disrupt ecosystems, agriculture, and human settlements (*Ghimire, 2012*). Mangrove loss due to human activity and climate change further heightens vulnerability.

Efforts such as habitat restoration, climate-resilient agriculture, disaster preparedness, and wildlife conservation are underway, supported by initiatives like the Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve (1989), Project Tiger (1973), ICZMP, and the Department of Sundarban Affairs (1994). These programs focus on ecological balance and livelihood security.

While progress has been made in infrastructure, afforestation, and awareness, gaps remain in inclusivity, planning, and governance. Lasting resilience will come from strategies that are not just technically sound, but also socially just, ecologically robust, and psychologically responsive placing local communities, especially the marginalised, at the centre of every decision.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The success and outcome of this article was made possible by the guidance and assistance of many people. We feel extremely privileged to have received this support. We would like to express our sincere appreciation to our esteemed Professor, Smt. Ritubarna Pratihari, whose contribution was invaluable in the completion of this research paper. We fully acknowledge her assistance and are deeply grateful for her help.

**REFERENCE**

- Alongi, D.M. (2008) 'Mangrove forests: resilience, protection from tsunamis, and responses to global climate change', *Estuarine, Coastal and Shelf Science*.
- Behera, B., Datta, P. and Ragut, D. (2023) 'Climate change and water-related threats in the Indian Sundarbans: food security and management implications', 5 June.
- Centre for Financial Accountability (Cenfa), 'The uncertain future of Sundarbans'. [online] Available at: <https://www.cenfa.org/the-uncertain-future-of-sundarbans/> [Accessed 8 May. 2025].
- Chauhan, M. and Gopal, B. (2006) 'Biodiversity and its conservation in the Sundarban Mangrove Ecosystem', *Aquatic Sciences*, 68(3), pp. 338–354.
- Chowdhary, C. (2019) 'Sundarbans could entirely vanish in the next 50 years, taking with it the Bengal tiger', 19 February.
- Danda, A.A., Sriskanthan, G., Ghosh, A., Bandyopadhyay, J. and Hazra, S. (2019) *Indian Sundarbans delta: A vision*. New Delhi: WWF-India.
- Dasgupta, R., Shaw, R. and Ghosh, S. (2020) 'Declining mangrove health: a review of climate drivers and anthropogenic pressures in the Sundarbans', *Environmental Science & Policy*, 112, pp. 453–463.
- Dasgupta, S., Laplante, B., Murray, S. and Wheeler, D. (2010) 'Exposure of developing countries to sea-level rise and storm surges', *Climatic Change*, 106(4), pp. 567–579.

- Ghimire, K.M. and Vikas, M. (2012) 'Climate change – impact on the Sundarbans: A case study'.
- Ghosh, T., Hajra, R. and Mukhopadhyay, A. (2015) 'Climate-induced displacement in the Sundarbans: a case study of Indian Bengal', *Economic & Political Weekly*, 50(32), pp. 55–62.
- Giri, C. et al. (2015) 'Status and distribution of mangrove forests of the world using earth observation satellite data', *Global Ecology and Biogeography*.
- Goodman, E.,(2021). 'Benefits of mangroves – flood protection'. [online] The Leaf Charity. Available at: <https://www.theleafcharity.com/blog/benefits-of-mangroves-flood-protection> [Accessed 9 May.. 2025].
- Gopal, B. and Chauhan, M. (2006) 'Biodiversity and its conservation in the Sundarban Mangrove Ecosystem', *Aquatic Sciences*, 68(3), pp. 338–354.
- GoSharpener. 'Sundarbans increasing pollution'. [online] Available at: [https://gosharpener.com/blogs/446136/Sundarbans-increasing-pollution?lang=en\\_us](https://gosharpener.com/blogs/446136/Sundarbans-increasing-pollution?lang=en_us) [Accessed 5 May. 2025].
- Hazra, S., Ghosh, T., Dasgupta, R. and Sen, G. (2002) 'Sea level and associated changes in the Sundarbans', *Science and Culture*, 68(9–12), pp. 309–321.
- IPCC (2014) *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), *Cyclone*. [online] Available at: <https://ndma.gov.in/Natural-Hazards/Cyclone#:~:text=Cyclones%20are%20caused%20by%20atmospheric...>[Accessed 8 May. 2025].

- Payo, A. et al. (2016) 'Projected changes in area of the Sundarbans mangrove forest in Bangladesh due to sea level rise by 2100', *Climatic Change*, 139(2), pp. 279–291.
- Sen, G., Dasgupta, R., Hazra, S. and Ghosh, T. (n.d.) 'Sea level and associated changes in the Sundarbans'.
- Singh, O.P. (2007) 'Long-term trends in the frequency of severe cyclones of Bay of Bengal: Observations and simulations', *MAUSAM*, 58(1), pp. 59–66.
- Sundarban Affairs Department. 'Home'. [online] Available at: <https://sundarbanaffairswb.in/> [Accessed 9 May. 2025].
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 'The Sundarbans'. [online] Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/798/> [Accessed 5 May.. 2025].
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre. 'UNESCO discusses climate resilience in Sundarbans'. [online] Available at: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2154> [Accessed 8 May. 2025].
- Unnikrishnan, A.S., RameshKumar, M.R. and Sindhu, B. (2011) 'Tropical cyclones in the Bay of Bengal and extreme sea-level projections along the east coast of India', *Current Science*, 101(3), pp. 327–331.
- World Bank (2015) 'Project Performance Assessment Report: India – National Cyclone Risk Mitigation Project'. Available at: <https://www.worldbank.org> [Accessed 13 April 2025].
- World Bank (2021) 'Building resilience in the Sundarbans: Post-Amphan recovery needs assessment'. Washington, DC: World Bank.

# ***The Cartoon Complex: Male Anxiety and the New Woman***

## **Editorial Cartoons from *Sachitra Shishir* and *Sanivarer Chithi* (1921–29)**

**Mallika Roy Chowdhury**

Assistant Professor, Department of History

### **Abstract**

In the early twentieth century, anxieties regarding the New Woman were an enduring theme in debates and discussions as seen from literary and visual representations of Bengali society. This article examines the nature of these anxieties, by analysing editorial cartoons from contemporary Bengali periodicals *Sachitra Shishir* and *Sanivarer Chithi* using a discursive approach. Keeping in mind the historical specificity of Bengali society in the 1920s, the article suggests that the discourse on the modern woman needs to be analysed not just through the unpacking of visual tropes found within the cartoon but also through teasing out the various strands of politics the cartoonist employs to express his moralistic concern. Such cartoons thereby serving as an essential source through which contemporary notions of modernity, conservatism, and gender norms can be explored.

**Keywords:** Bengali editorial cartoons, cultural history, conservatism, modernity, gender norms.

## Introduction

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed debates on several aspects— be it on politics, economy, or society— both formal and informal arenas of public discourse and discussion. One of the enduring themes in both literary and visual representations of men, women, and the community was around the anxiety of the ‘New’ or the ‘modern woman’. The New Woman was a product of Western education, an aspiring figure who pushed for franchise, egalitarianism, and employment and constituted a threat to topple the existing gender hierarchy by stepping into men’s role in the public sphere. The New Woman was both a source of awe and anxiety and conservative reactions to this figure ranged from morally anxious to outright misogynistic and scathing. Debates arose regarding the role of women in the home and public arena, the relationship between women and consumerism, and the relation between the New Woman with Western education and attire. British India and particularly Bengal was no exception in the 1920s and thereafter. Intellectuals, writers, journalists, politicians, sacerdotal heads, and artists grappled with the question of the New Woman<sup>1</sup>. This article looks at some of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Rabindranath Tagore’s 1916 novel *Ghare Baire* is a more sympathetic and nuanced commentary on the emergence of the New Woman and the threat her new found persona poses to the domestic order. The novel places the protagonist Bimala in the fold between the Home and the World and the tensions which emerge when Bimala, recipient of her *bhadralok* husband Nikhil’s emancipatory affections and Victorian

cartoons published in *Sachitra Shishir* and *Sanivarer Chithi* from 1925–to 1929 and places the conservative response regarding modernity, western education and culture, and the emergence of the New Woman.

Both *Sachitra Shishir* and *Sanivarer Chithi* are considered more conservative periodicals that came out in the first half of the twentieth century when compared to more liberal and progressive weeklies and monthlies like *Kallol*.<sup>2</sup> *Sachitra Shishir* (trans. *Illustrated Dewdrops*) was a monthly edited by Bijayratna Majumdar (1921–24) and Shishirkumar Mitra (1924–28). It was considered an

---

etiquette and education, believes she can be an agent of change during the anti-colonial Swadeshi struggle. Her bravado and subsequent folly is revealed when she crosses the metaphorical threshold when she is swayed by her husband's friend Sandip who is an impassioned revolutionary of the Indian freedom movement. Tagore through Bimala posits the quandary the Bengali gentleman might have to encumber if he chooses to educate and liberate his wife from her assigned domestic role. The binary between the inner and outer world is also perhaps held with great regard and the threat to blur the lines between the two especially regarding the woman is seen with alarm by Tagore.

<sup>2</sup> *Kallol* (literally meaning the Sound of Waves) was a literary journal edited by Gokulchandra Nag and Dineshranjan Das first published in 1923. *Kallol* was the main mouthpiece for a group of young writers starting their careers around that time including Premendra Mitra, Kazi Nazrul Islam, and Buddhadeb Basu. It later constituted as a literary movement in Bengal believed to range from 1923–1935.

important Bengali periodical on fine arts, literature, art critique and appreciation<sup>3</sup>. *Sanivarer Chithi* (meaning the *Saturday Post* in English) was a monthly Bengal literary magazine published by Shaniranjana Press in Kolkata. It was founded in 1929 by Ashok Chattopadhyay as the conservative response to the progressive literary magazine *Kalol* which was founded a year ago. Started as a weekly, it subsequently became a monthly publication. The magazine was one of the major satirical publications in the country and had editors like Jogananda Das, Nirad C. Chaudhuri, and Sajanikanta Das.

The cartoons in both these periodicals were not anachronisms or incongruous to the Bengali reading public at the time of their circulation. One of the earliest cartoons could be found in the *Indian Charivari*<sup>4</sup>. The British magazine of satire and humour, *Punch*, which started creating waves across the colonial world through the 1850s and 60s, is supposed to have inspired Bengali cartoons. However, *Punch* was replete with cartoons that mocked Indians as “an enslaved race”. Some feel the cartoons that

---

<sup>3</sup> *A Guide to Hiteshranjan Sanyal Memorial Collection*, prepared by Abhijit Bhattacharya.

<sup>4</sup> P. Windham, an American started the publication of *Indian Charivari*, in November 1872 from Calcutta. Dalia Chakrabarti, ‘The Cartoon of a Bengali Lady Clerk: A Repertoire of Sociological Data’, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 53, No. 2, May–August 2004, p.261.

emerged in Bengali periodicals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were a response to the colonial attitude towards the natives.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Culture of Satire and Humour in Bengal**

Cartoons in printed publications may have been a late nineteenth-century entrant into the Bengali public discourse, but Bengal has enjoyed a robust culture of humour and satire in all possible art forms predating colonial times. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature is replete with references to satirical performance-based productions such as *jatras* (a popular folk-theatre form of Bengali theatre), *swangs*, (another form of popular folk-theatre which incorporates suitable theatrics and mimicry (or *nakal*) accompanied by song and dialogue). *Torja* (a folk poetry contest that later transformed into *Kobi Gaan* which dealt with more contemporary issues) and other pantomimes and burlesques which mocked the existing order, often at the expense of the patricians be it the zamindars, colonial authorities, or the new class of comprador bourgeoisie and *babus*. Even the Kalighat *patachitras* and vignettes apart from existing literature were

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Subhendu Dasgupta “Naturally, Bengali cartoons were created to counter this. In 1874, when the two cartoon magazines — Harbola Bhar and Basantak — were published, they were popularly touted as the 'Indian Punch'. Source- ‘Tracing Bengal’s legacy of cartoons over 140 years’, *Times of India*, August 11, 2012.

not bereft of satire and diatribes aimed at those in power and the *nouveau riche*.<sup>6</sup>

Folk art and performances have commonly conveyed subversive and non-conformist messages. *Hasya* and *Prahasan* were common framing tropes in Indian society. Existing social hierarchies and conventions were questioned and laughed at through pantomimes, limericks, one-act plays, and folk theatre. This form of questioning was part of folk visual art like Kalighat and Battala *patachitra*, along with vignette literature. These were, however, primarily social satire. Some of these forms came under pressure with the coming in of the bioscope, cinema, photographs, and print journalism. The first printing press in Kolkata was set up in 1777 by James Augustus Hicky and following the lead

---

<sup>6</sup> There is a substantial scholarship which agrees with the notion that most of the satirists were originally agricultural workers who had migrated from the rural countryside into the city space of Calcutta in the nineteenth century and were still carrying a substantial memory of their folk art and tradition. Due to the tensions that emerged between their perceived tradition and the new modernity of the city they were embroiled with, much of their reaction to this change was manifested through their art and commentary on the changing social order. See Ratnabali Chatterjee, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: A study in the changing social rules of patron and artist in Bengal*, New Delhi, Books & Books Publishers, 1990 . Sumanta Banerjee, 'Laughter as Subversion in Nineteenth Century Calcutta's Popular Culture', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No.3/4, *The Calcutta Psyche*, Winter 1990/91, pp-186-208.

of his English weekly *Hicky's Gazette* several periodicals in the English language such as the *Indian Gazette* (1780) and *Calcutta Gazette* (1784) were published. By 1789, these presses were casting the indigenous Nastalik and Devanagari fonts needed for Persian and Hindustani advertisements. By 1799, the production of graphics in the form of maps and accompanying illustrations to the texts was a common sight.<sup>7</sup>

With the development of the art of printing in Bengal, and the introduction of lithography, chromolithography, oleography, off-set printing, and even photography in the mid-nineteenth century, a space was created for the popularization of the printed cartoon in the 1850s. Cartoons appeared in both English and the vernacular periodicals, or cartoon journals, newspapers, and magazines, caricature and satire became during the 1870s part of the new print culture, and thereby, in most cases, a text of public opinion as well.<sup>8</sup> The power of these images increased as they circulated more widely with the coming

---

<sup>7</sup> By first half of the 1800s, these presses were already printing in several Indian languages including Bengali, Oriya, Kannada, Punjabi, Maratha and Telegu amongst others. C.f. *Printed and Book Production in Bengal: A booklet on the exhibition at Rabindranath Tagore Centre 14th February 2009–21st February 2009*. Presented by the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University Press, 2009, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> See Partha Mitter Sanjukta Sunderason, Mphil Dissertation, *Framed dialogues: a study of graphic satire and caricature in Colonial Calcutta 1850–1930*, 2006, JNU, New Delhi, p. 6.

up of wheeler bookstalls on pavements, railway stations, and libraries, and the establishment of cheap printing presses, i.e., the new Chitra Shala press in Poona (Bombay Presidency) and the Battala Press (Bengal Presidency) and other smaller printing presses.<sup>9</sup>

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a phenomenal rise in publishing, and printing presses mushroomed in certain localities of Calcutta, Battala Press being one of the notable ones. Both British-owned and local presses like the one owned by Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri, were able to produce relatively cheap books and booklets, sometimes with illustrations, on a large scale, catering to both the literate and semi-literate masses. By the time the anti-colonial struggle began, vernacular presses were producing periodicals and books in full swing. Illustrations accompanying children's novels and periodicals were particularly significant due to reprographic technology<sup>10</sup>.

These publications are remarkable as they indicate the diverse nature of the readership they were trying to tap

---

<sup>9</sup> See Kamalika Mukherjee, *Parallel Lives: Charting the History of Popular Prints of the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies*, archive series no. 3, Kolkata, CSSSC publications, 2011.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

onto. While the British and Company-owned presses had a fixed niche of readers to cater to, the vernacular presses had both the highly literate and semi-literate readership in mind. The genres comprised a wide spectrum ranging from politics to religion, biographies to satire.<sup>11</sup>

The caricatural form of visual representation, often found in cartoons makes an unsentimental observation of human foibles but the element of body humour and the grotesque as found in its European counterparts was relatively less pronounced in Bengali editorial cartoons.<sup>12</sup> The earliest newspapers to carry political cartoons were the English owned *Bengal Hurkam* and the *Bengal Gazette* in the 1850s. Within decades as art historian Partha Mitter notes, cartoons appeared in papers owned by Indians as colonial administration became the legitimate target of

---

<sup>11</sup> One remarkable publication of this time was *Hootum Pnyachar Naksha* (*Vignettes from Hootum-the Owl*). Written by Kaliprasanna Sinha and published in 1862, the book was a compilation of satirical social sketches which reflected on the changing nature of Bengali urban society and often targeted the upstarts and those with westernized aspirations.

<sup>12</sup> The art of caricature as distinct from cartoons predates the nineteenth century, Italian brothers Annibale and Agostini Carrcci are attributed as the first caricaturists when they produced a series of satirical drawings called the *ritratini carichi* (*loaded portraits*). It is from their name that the term ‘caricature’ was born and their idea of “perfect deformity” has defined the template for caricatural drawings.

journalists.<sup>13</sup> The nationalist paper of Bengal, *Amrit Bazar Patrika* published the first cartoon in 1872.<sup>14</sup> By the time *Sanivarer Chithi* and *Sachitra Shishir* were in circulation in the 1920s and thereafter, there were several periodicals that published editorial cartoons and satirical illustrations.

### **The Viability of the Cartoon as a Source of Inquiry**

"It is in the condensation of a complex idea into one striking and memorable image that we find the appeal of [a] great cartoon".

–E.H. Gombrich.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike several other sources we come across, an editorial cartoon need not make claims of representing the “true, exact” version of the past. Instead with its employment of caricature and allusion to an event, a person or a trait for that matter, a sense of understanding of the past is apparently created, without claiming to be the exact representation of the past. As Christel R. Devadawson opines, graphic satire in an editorial cartoon attempts to tap popular imagination articulate political concerns.<sup>16</sup> It

---

<sup>13</sup> Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922*, Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 137.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> E.H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays the Theory of Art*, London, Phaidon Press, 1963, p.130.

<sup>16</sup> Christel R. Devadawson, *Out of Line: Cartoons, Caricature and Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2014, p.4.

highlights certain public issues in a serio-comic vein; urging popular imagination to be aware of and act against the excesses, foibles and transgressions of those in power, and the structures that assist them. It explores the possibilities of social remedies without offering one. These cartoons are not meant for simple humour. Acting as an image-and-text-based representation of graphic protest and observation on the way things are in society, it can attain didactic status. It can also acquire a dialectical relation with social practices and forces when people to whom it has been addressed to get persuaded by the visual enthymeme— a visual argument whose premise is not explicitly stated. As sociologist Dalia Chakrabarti suggests, the cartoon as a sociological tool can reveal the moral standpoints of a given historical society as it criticizes it.<sup>17</sup> The cartoons that will be discussed from *Sachitra Shishir* and *Sanivarer Chithi* between the years 1925 and 1929 were visual representations that went hand-in-hand with literary discussions on the ‘problem’ around the ‘new woman’. This anxiety gets much attention in the cartoons and it revolves around the issue of domesticity and the shifts that can surface within normative gender roles and relationships. Looking at the flurry of cartoons in the 1925 issues of *Sachitra Shishir*, which compared the —idealized domestic woman to the —haughty woman of the present, one notices the depth of anxiety of the magazine with the changes in her demeanour and attire.

---

<sup>17</sup> Dalia Chakrabarti, ‘The Cartoon of Bengali Lady Clerk: A Repertoire of Sociological Data’, *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 53, No. 2, May–August 2004, p. 252.

Figure 1 shows a cartoon by Binoy Krishna Basu which came out in *Sachitra Shishir* in 1925. The sketch idealizes the hardworking domesticated woman of yore. Seen threshing grain on a *dheki* (a traditional rice mill or husking pedal), Basu contrasts the condition of women from *sekal* (then) to those from *ekal* (now). The good woman was docile, traditional, and committed to the service of her home. The modern woman was the exact opposite.

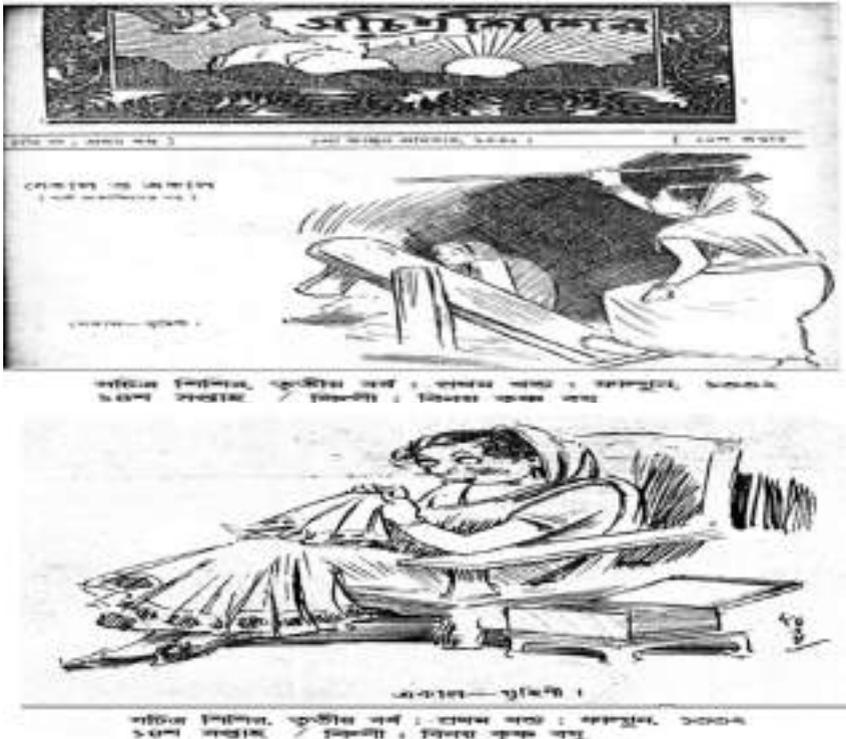


Fig. 1 'Sekal Grihini O Ekal Grihini', (Housewife from Then and Now), *Sachitra Shishir*, 3rd year, first volume, 1925, 14<sup>th</sup> week, cartoonist Binoy Krishna Basu.

The *Ekal Grihini* sketch shows a woman seated on an armchair, dressed in a neatly draped sari with a veil over her head. Even though she is dressed in a sari, she is seen wearing a blouse unlike the rural woman in Figure 1. The blouse itself is a sign of modernity keeping in mind the historical specificity of Bengal at the time, the sign of espousal of Victorian tastes in women. The lady is seen conscious of her comportment and is shown wearing flat-heeled closed slippers. She seems to have applied lipstick and rouge on her cheeks. The lady belongs to an affluent class and is seen concentrating on her embroidery over a napkin- a sign of acculturation with European sensibilities is unmistakable here.

The cartoons by Binoy Krishna Basu depict the modern women who reverse the existing norms of social order by driving motor cars, in full public view while their men don the veil; women who know about the latest fashion and take up new professions. Fed by male anxiety, Basu fantasizes a future where women are seen as policewomen, judges, and even doctors; and perhaps worse- as domineering women both at home and at work- much to the alarm of men.

Figure 2 is less subtle in its expression of anxiety regarding the possible new social role of women who are stepping out of the domestic milieu into the outer realm. The cartoon imagines the woman taking control of the

reins of the carriage while the docile and alarmed husband hides behind the curtains of the carriage. The woman's demeanour is shown as officious and is seen brandishing the whip with fierce abandon. The cartoonist's moral panic is hard to miss and the overwhelming mood of this cartoon is of disdain towards the nincompoop husband and of fear towards the new woman.



Fig. 2: “*Pati-Mahal Parda Aade*”- “The men-folk retire behind the veil”, *Sachitra Shishir*, 1925, 6<sup>th</sup> -7<sup>th</sup> week, Christmas edition, 1925.

Figure 3 shows a series of cartoons by Binoy Krishna Basu on the different occupations the new woman would be holding when she steps out into the world. The first sketch is that of a surly-looking policewoman, wearing a police coat and belt tightly wrapped around her waist. With a baton in her hand, office shoes over her feet, and hands over her hips, the woman appears as an imposing and domineering figure.

The second sketch shows a woman in the position of a judge wearing the hitherto assigned robes meant for a male judge while the third sketch shows a woman doctor examining a rather bewildered male patient. Seen with a stethoscope and a doctor's coat, the woman doctor appears competent. However, the anxiety of the male patient displays the alarm with which the New Woman was being perceived by men.

Such social and professional uplift in the condition of women is seen with great panic by the cartoonist who not only lampoons the female form by caricaturing her facial features but also expresses the anxiety around the perceived aggressive demeanour of the New Woman. Her newfound independence is manifested through her androgyny, her donning of clothing (coats and shoes) and jobs that were hitherto associated with men. This change, Basu suggests, has led to unimagined upheaval in the home and the world. Her clothes and her ability to read, write and think for herself thus become utmost anxiety and alarm. The role of modernity and the anxiety it brings about, is clearly defined in these pictures. French poet and essayist, Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) had considered monstrosity through the figure of the woman exposed to the modern metropolis. In her understanding of Baudelaire's ideas, Loretta Vandi writes, "The modern woman is that who paints herself, wears eccentric dresses, exhibits instead of

concealing her deformed body, and feels her personality, alive only within the modern landscape of the metropolis".<sup>18</sup>

In Figure 4, by caricaturing her and by heightening the extent of change in hetero-normative gender relations, cartoonist Basu urges the reading public (perhaps to the male reading public) to realize the ill-effect of western education. Women cannot be unshackled; they must not enter public life. Perceived as a threat to the familial dynamic and even the physical well-being of the male householder, the woman could well be the new hoodlum, one who orders and admonishes and belittles her husband in front of the children and more importantly one who would be able to reverse patriarchy. It is in my reading this very fear that has triggered this anxiety as can be seen in these cartoons.

Unlike other stereotypical depictions on the degenerate, deviant woman, this anxiety is of a different kind. Instead of explicitly worrying about the new woman's sexuality or morality, this anxiety is around the New Woman who threatens to dethrone the man

---

<sup>18</sup> Loretta Vandi, 'The Sublime Monstrosity: C. Baudelaire on Modernity', in Ni Fhlainn (ed.), *Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections: Essays on the Monster in Culture*, UK, Inter disciplinary Press, 2006, p. 391.

from his hierarchical position in gender relations. This is the anxiety around androgyny.

Androgyny refers to sex-role flexibility and adaptability. The major underlying assumption of this perspective of sex roles is that the individual may act in either a masculine or a feminine manner, depending on situation constraints and needs. An important caveat is added by Susan Viswanathan in this regard. Androgyny according to Viswanathan different from gender neutrality. It means overcoming the cultural parameters of what it means to be a man or a woman, questioning existing boundaries of the permissible and acceptability. Work then is defined in terms of ability and interest, and the distinctions between men's work and women's work would at once be subverted. Androgyny then is about fearlessness, and role choices which are not biologically defined.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Susan Viswanathan, 'From Housewifization to Androgyny', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4, Second Nature: Women and the Family, 1996, p.185. Regarding androgyny, an important point Maithreyi Krishnaraj raises is androgyny obscures the social context - it is as if individuals can effortlessly balance traits and behavior in a social vacuum. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 31, No. 16/17, Apr. 20-27, 1996, p. WS9.

Instead of overthrowing gender roles completely, the women in these cartoons transgress what tradition defines as the limits of permissible action, blurring existing boundaries. By appropriating a coat, a garment that only men hitherto wore, and wearing closed shoes which would facilitate easy movement in her public life, the women do not appear as cross-dressers or transvestites, something we need to remember when dealing with categories on sexual and gender behaviours. They claim new domains of identity for the feminine. But this assertion creates panic amongst those who see the existing gender roles as natural and universal.

The anxiety regarding the modern woman was nothing new and was not the last of the many debates and discussions on it as well. In many ways, the above cartoons pre-empted the furore regarding the Age of Consent Bill in 1929–30 and whether it would affect the existing hierarchal gender relations. The Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1929 – popularly known as the Sarada Act after its sponsor Rai Sahib Harbilas Sarada – was passed on 28 September 1929, fixing the age of marriage for girls at 14 years and boys at 18 years. The specified years were later amended to 18 for girls and 21 for boys. The Act came into effect six months later on April 1, 1930 and it applied to all of British India, and to all communities, not just to Hindus. The Bill, was acknowledged as the first social reform issue which was

taken up by the organized women in India. They played a major role in the development of the argument and actively used the device of political petition. Considered as a major victory for the women's movement in India, the act itself was a complete failure. In the two years and five months it was an active bill, there were 473 prosecutions, of which only 167 were successful.

The panel of cartoons Figure 5 from *Sanivarer Chithi* above voice the concerns of those who opposed the raising of the age of marriage. The first panel “Vivah”, shows how the shackled and helpless girl-child when married off to the adult Hindu male could be picked up in a sack like a commodity and be carried off. The second panel titled “Nikah”, shows how a Muslim man could easily snatch that girl away, with the use of brute force, as if he was wresting a sack of potatoes from someone. A bitter fight could thus ensue between the Hindu and Muslim male, but instead of mulling over a possible confrontation, the cartoonist posits the third panel which shows the situation post the Sarada bill. Instead of haggling with each other over the girl-child to whom neither have any legal rights anymore, the two are shown bridled to each other, one by his beard tied to the other's pigtail by a fallen woman, whose degree of degeneration is signified by an ignited cigarette between her lips. That is the offer/solution of the fallen-woman (*Patitar Nikat Nibedan*) as the caption

reads. The world of the males were collapsing, Muslim and Hindu males are together in chains.



Fig. 3- Cartoons depicting the different occupations of the New Woman- from top (L-R) Woman police, Lady Judge and Lady Doctor.



Fig. 4- *Mey Gunda (Girl Hoodlum)*, and a literate wife reading the newspaper admonishing an already harried husband, cartoonist Binoy K. Basu, *Sachitra Shishir*, 1925.

## Conclusion

In many of these the satirical image becomes a site for the expression of the political. Image-making taps on existing popular imagination and the cultural resources of tradition to express the political message. The emergence of print helped in the expansion of that discursive arena through which the different spectra of the same community could interface, reflect and even contend with each other, with the other and even with the self at a more reflective moment.

A pictorial cartoon triggers off a range of conversations. There is first a dialogue between the

panel of the cartoon that is created and the context which led to its creation; then there is the imagined tête-à-tête between its characters and the inter-action with its reader and creator. Cartoonists tend to draw upon existing anxieties within society, the fears that were popularly expressed, and the notions that circulated. Binoy Basu and his contemporaries were no different. The cartoon questioned some of these assertions and affirmed others. In the process they set of a conversation between the public and the image, mediating the constitution of the public itself.

The questions that even historians have to ask are these: how do stereotypes work? In what form do they articulate and mediate the politics of a time? We need to understand not just the elements of an image but also the politics of the image. What are the tropes that are deployed to mobilize social sentiment, anger and support? Can we separate the questions of freedom of the cartoonists from the politics that their images convey?

This very nature of animated persuasion is situated on the fulcrum of image-and-text-based representation. Only by reading both the visual and the textual together can we unpack graphic dissent. Pictorial images, as Sumathi Ramaswamy has argued, are porous, permeable and every ready for appropriation;<sup>20</sup> it is more often than not

---

<sup>20</sup> Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*, New Delhi, Sage, p.151.

aided by news reporting. Graphic satire thus requires the utmost vigilance on the part of the reader, no matter to which spectrum of the split-public he may belong. The reader has to guard against an overcompensating dependence on that which is said by the graphic image. His/her reading requires a dialogue with the wider world of print.





Fig. 5.1: Before the Sarada Bill: Vivah and Nikah, *Sanivarer Chithi*,  
Cartoonist unknown, September 1929



Fig. 5.2. After the Sarada Bill: Stronger: Patitatar Nikat Nibedan:  
*Sanivarer Chithi*, September 1929.

More crucial to the case study of this paper is the kind of reading and decoding we need to employ in the reading of these satirical images. Did Binoy Basu's satirical sketches on the 'Modern Woman' seek to castigate only the woman or did he intend to expose the fragile sense of the male self which could come crumbling down easily when threatened by female competence in the public domain? Did the cartoonists of both the conservative periodicals *Sanivarer Chithi* and *Sachitra Shishir* in a tacit way make light of the staunch conservatist stance as found in their editorial pieces? How did the readers receive such satirical sketches? Was the public sphere then a mainly masculinist and elitist one? If so, did the educated and literate woman not have recourse to any other forms of journalism? One can perhaps grapple

with these questions, as the question of spectatorship and interpretation is an open-ended one.

However if one were to set aside these questions, the literature on the politics of anxiety around the woman is seen as synecdoche for a crisis in culture. The argument made by scholarship on dress in South Asia, that there was "more at stake in women signifying the purity of their 'culture' than for men".<sup>21</sup> The use of Westernized attire for the New Woman was not accidental by the cartoonist. Jean Gelman Taylor has argued that the Western-style "suit" embodied the "power and ability to enforce power".<sup>22</sup> When a woman is seen wearing a western attire she is knowingly or otherwise exuding the power of choice over her onlookers.

The discourse on the contentious feminine figure also needs to be analyzed as a product and expression of two distinct but interrelated developments in colonial India: first, a crisis in masculinity— something that Mrinalini Sinha's work amply testifies to resulting largely from the political, social, and economic displacement of indigenous

---

<sup>21</sup> See M.De. Alwis, 'Respectability,' 'Modernity' and the Policing of 'Culture in Colonial Ceylon', In *Gender, Sexuality and Colonial Modernities*, ed. Antoinette Burton, 177-92. London: Routledge, 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Jean Taylor, 'Costume and Gender in Colonial Java, 1800-1940', *Outward Appearances: Dressing State and Society in Indonesia*, ed. HenkSchulteNordholt, Leiden, KTLIV Press, p.100.

men.<sup>23</sup> Second, shifts in understandings of gender roles and relations, namely the newfound social mobility and cultural authority of the colonial but educated Indian female. Chie Ikeya's argument that fashion constitutes as the epitome of change and mutability in society is an engaging one in this regard.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from a fear of progressive and cultural colonialism over that of indigenous tradition, the New Woman was a hybrid figure. One who was brown in colour, but white in aspirational. One who wears the sari, but wears a western coat over it. One who may marry into a household but does not conform to hitherto assigned gender roles of being only a valuable breeder and carer of the household. The New Woman reads, thinks and utilizes her mental faculties even when she is at home. Even when the New Woman mixes western attire with Indian, she is not always doing it out of emulation of the colonizers. The hybrid modern outfit was not only a sartorial choice necessitated by changes in the clothing industry but also one that appealed to those who endeavored to modernize their image without imitating their colonizers.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali*, London, Manchester University Press, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Chie Ikeya, 'The Modern Burmese Woman and the Politics of Fashion in Colonial Burma', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 4, (Nov., 2008), pp. 1277-1308

## References

Illustrations from India Arts Foundation Prakashan, compiled by Subhendu Dasgupta, H.R. Sanyal Archive, CSSSC, Kolkata. Periodicals: *Sanivarer Chithi* and *Sachitra Shishir*.

## Readings

Chakrabarti, D., 'The Cartoon of a Bengali Lady Clerk: A Repertoire of Sociological Data', *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol. 53, No. 2, May–August 2004.

Devadawson, C.R., *Out of Line, Cartoons and Caricature and Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2014.

Gombrich, E. H (with Ernst Kris), 'The Principles of Caricature', *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, Vol. 17, 1938, pp.319–42 [Trapp no.1938A.1].

Ikeya, Chie 'The Modern Burmese Woman and the Politics of Fashion in Colonial Burma', *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 67, No. 4, (Nov., 2008), pp. 1277–1308.

Khanduri, R.G., *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Mitchell, W.J.T., *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995.

Mitter, P., *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850–1922*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Mukherjee, Kamalika, *Parallel Lives: Charting the History of Popular Prints of the Bengal and Bombay Presidencies*, archive series no. 3, Kolkata, CSSSC publications, 2011.

*Printed and Book Production in Bengal: A booklet on the exhibition at Rabindranath Tagore Centre 14th February 2009–21st February 2009*. Presented by the School of Cultural Texts and Records, Jadavpur University Press, 2009, p. 2.

Roychowdhury, M. 'The Pervasive and the Persuasive Image: Aspects of Visual Culture in 20<sup>th</sup> century Bengal', submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2015.

Shikes, R.E., *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso*, Beacon Press, Boston., 1969.

Sinha, Mrinalini *Colonial Masculinity: The Manly Englishman and the Effeminate Bengali*, London, Manchester University Press, 1995

Sunderason, S., *Framed Dialogues, A Study of Graphic Satire and Caricatures in Colonial Calcutta, 1850–1930*, MPhil. Dissertation submitted to JNU.

Vandi, Loretta, 'The Sublime Monstrosity: C. Baudelaire on Modernity', in Ni Fhlainn (ed.), *Dark Reflections, Monstrous Reflections: Essays on the Monster in Culture*, UK, Interdisciplinary Press, 2006

Viswanathan, Susan, 'From Housewifization to Androgyny', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4, Second Nature: Women and the Family, 1996.

### **Acknowledgments**

This article owes much of its direction to a chapter from my unpublished M.Phil. dissertation ‘The Pervasive and the Persuasive Image: Aspects of Visual Culture of Twentieth-Century Bengal’, submitted in 2015 to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. My pictorial sources are from the Hitesh Ranjan Sanyal Archive, Centre for Studies of Social Sciences, Calcutta. Special thanks to Smt. Kamalika Mukherjee for helping me access relevant resources.

I am grateful to my M.Phil. supervisors, Dr Neeladri Bhattacharya and Dr Tanika Sarkar, along with other professors at CHS, JNU, viz. Dr. Kunal Chakrabarti, Dr. Radhika Singha, and my external examiner Dr. Aparna Balachandran, for their valuable suggestions and feedback on several drafts of a previous version of this article. I am also grateful to my PhD supervisor Dr. Abhijit Gupta, and my senior colleagues Dr Devaleena Sinha and Dr Chitrita Banerjee for motivating me to write this article.

# The Detective – Police Association In The Detective Narratives of Hemendra Kumar Roy

**Piu Guha**

Department of History, Shri Shikshayatan College

## **Abstract**

The critically neglected domain of Bengali detective fiction is a dynamic genre that serves as a symbolic reflection of society. The present article charts the trajectory of the detective–police interactions in the detective tales of Hemendra Kumar Roy, one of the leading exponents of the genre. The detective’s status as a crime–fighter, in these narratives, is closely interwoven with the theme of the incompetence of the law–enforcing bodies.

**Keywords:** indigeneity, nationalism, masculinity, surveillance, effeminacy, post–colonial.

Print and publishing became the vehicles for a great change in the literary sphere of Bengal by the middle of the nineteenth century. The mushrooming of printing presses, publishing houses and circulating libraries created a rapidly expanding reading public and accelerated the growth of fiction. Intimately linked with this process was the emergence of a world of commercial publishing which offered a range of 'texts of pleasure'<sup>1</sup> aimed at entertainment and leisure. Among the most commercially successful

published works, mention should be made of detective fiction, "a genre introduced with no previous local tradition",<sup>2</sup> which significantly contributed to the creation of a habit of reading for pleasure. It became the template for a new kind of fiction focused on crime.

Detective fiction, a sub-genre of crime fiction, is one of the most widely read branches of popular literature. Yet it has traditionally been marginalised as 'inferior' , 'formulaic', 'low-brow' recreational literature, incapable of delivering the aesthetic pleasures of reading. The popularity of the genre was largely due to the fact that it offered the readers a chance to escape from the grim realities of everyday existence and at the same time capitalised on their fear of crime and desire for safety, by using the figure of the detective (as the restorer of the status quo ) to reassure them.

The English detective fiction exerted a profound influence on the birth and development of the genre in Bengali. Fransesca Orsini argues, "The Detective novel was introduced first when translated from English into Bengali and from Bengali into other Indian languages at the end of the nineteenth century ..."<sup>3</sup> Soon, however, the genre acquired from the West was domesticated. Although the early practitioners of the genre adopted English narrative formats, in British colonies like India, native writers invented their own motifs and tropes to incorporate a sense of nativeness into their literatures to attract local audiences. The colonized litterateurs, who sought to develop a

national identity in the wake of prolonged colonial rule, drew on indigenous cultural traditions and languages as tools of self-assertion with which to create an alternative perspective that challenged the carefully mapped preconceptions of Eurocentric detective fiction about the Orient as the site of crime and exploitation. The detectives in these texts are generally colonized sub-alterns with a voice, representing their indigenous culture and national identity.

One of the most representative writers of Bengali detective fiction is Hemendra Kumar Roy (1888-1963). The genre was brought within the paradigm of juvenile literature (*kishor sahitya*) by Roy in the third decades of the twentieth century. Despite imbibing western modernity, Roy used indigeneity as a crucial tool to reinforce the distinctiveness of Bengali cultural identity and raise voice against imperial control over the sub-altern literature of the colonised. Roy was also the creator of the hitherto unseen indigenous models of adventurist and scientific detectives (Jayanta Chowdhury, Hemanta Chowdhury and Dilip Chowdhury). Roy, moreover, deserves credit for introducing the novel concept of a detective triumvirate<sup>4</sup> consisting of the detective, his confidante and a third person – a police officer in Roy's case. The writer, in fact, created two separate detective-trios, namely the Jayanta-Manik-Sundarbabu<sup>5</sup> trio and the Hemanta-Robin-Satishbabu trio.

The model of an all-seeing rational private investigator became immensely popular in late nineteenth and early

twentieth century Bengali detective fiction. The evolution of the 'goyenda' (detective) from colonial police officers to independent private investigators needs to be touched upon in this context. The police-memoirs like Priyonath Mukhopadhyay's 'Darogar Daptar'<sup>6</sup>(The Inspector's Office), and the early detective narratives record the transformation of the daroga 'goyenda' ( police detective) from meticulous crime investigators and suppressors of Thuggees<sup>7</sup> to hated agents of the colonial administrators and oppressors of the Bengali nationalists against the backdrop of the anti-Partition and Swadeshi movements (1905) that fanned the flame of Bengali nationalism. It was at this critical juncture of Bengali nationalist identity that the super intelligent private investigators, representing the greatest asset of the Bengali – his intellect – made their grand entry in the realm of Bengali detective fiction as the archetype of an aggressive Bengali masculinity. In the narratives of the subsequent period, the foolishness of the police was often used as a counterfoil to the detective's super intelligence. Thus, in most of the narratives the detective's success becomes a natural corollary to the ineptitude of the police who symbolise the failure of the state machinery.

The detective tales of Hemendra Kumar Roy bring out the interesting dimensions of the relationship between the police – the official custodians of law and order –and the private investigator for prevention of crime. According to Julian Symons, detectives are agents of surveillance and policing and the detective story promotes the heroization of these agents of surveillance in their daring struggles against

the perceived threats to order and stability..<sup>8</sup> The police, again, is often perceived to serve "as the metaphor for the colonial regime as a whole. Through the police it is possible to see institutionalized ... priorities and principles of colonial administration."<sup>9</sup> Roy's narratives throw significant light on the character of the colonial police and popular perception about it. To validate the detective's status as a justice-seeker, there are frequent references within the texts to the inadequacies of the state agencies like the police. Pasquale Pasquino, in his essay 'Science of Police in Europe in Eighteenth Century', identifies two disparate meanings of 'police'. From the Middle Ages until the late-eighteenth century, police "referred broadly to the administration of a population to promote happiness and the public good."<sup>10</sup> But from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the term came to be associated with "the maintenance of order and prevention of dangers."<sup>11</sup> None of these definitions holds good for the colonies. In the colonial context, 'happiness and public good' were secondary to power and profit – 'dangers' were largely seen as arising out of the activities of a recalcitrant population and, therefore, the 'administration of the population' implied the suppression of the challenges and threats to the colonial regime. Over the years, Bengali detective fiction has conformed to the stereotype of the corrupt and oppressive darogah, which was largely a reflection of the lack of respectability that was central to the bhadrakalok perception of the police in general. In the Jayanta-Manik narratives, Hemendra Kumar projects Sundarbabu, the third

person of the Jayanta–Manik–Sundarbabu trio and a colonial police officer, as a comic figure – dark, short, fat, bald, timid (bhitu), lacking physical and mental agility – a total misfit for his name and profession. With his peculiar mannerisms, blissful ignorance and penchant for food, Sundarbabu emerges as a model of comic immaturity, providing laughter and amusement in the sombre world of crime and suspense. As a counterfoil to Sundarbabu, the author projects his detective–assistant duo as not only super intelligent but also the epitome of courage and masculinity, thus overtly expressing his contempt for the colonial law-enforcing agencies while at the same time proclaiming the greatness of his race. This was in tune with the prevailing public distrust and disdain for the colonial police. Since the days of the Swadeshi and anti-Partition movement (1905), the atrocities of the police on Bengali nationalists had gradually turned them into villains in popular consciousness. The lack of faith in the role of the police as the law-enforcer has come up in Roy's texts time and again. In 'Jayanter Kirti' (Jayanta's Achievement, 1937) the client Mukunda Nandi openly tells the detective – “পুলিশের চেয়ে আমি আপনাকেই বেশি বিশ্বাস করি। পুলিশ ঘুষ খায়, আপনি খাঁটি লোক”<sup>12</sup> (I trust you more than the police. The police takes bribes; you are an honest man).

The author thereby subtly brings up the malpractices of the colonial regime. Such allusions are corroborated by contemporary newspaper reports which frequently refer to the corruption and unscrupulousness of the colonial police. The 'Des' (Calcutta), dated June 14, 1936, writes – "It is a

criminal offence for a Government servant to take bribes. Those who commit unjust oppression on others while wearing the uniform of the guardian of peace and transgress laws, should be awarded exemplary punishment." In the narrative 'Manush Pisach' (The Demonic Human, 1939), newspaper extracts within the text, state (in the context of the abduction of three women) – "...একালে ইংরেজ রাজত্বের কোনো জায়গায়...এমন তিন-তিনটি ঘটনা ঘটা সম্ভব কি...? যদি সম্ভবপর...হয়, তবে অনর্থক এই বিপুল পুলিশ-বাহিনী পুঁয়িয়া লাভ কী?"<sup>13</sup> (That such incidents can take place in the colonial regime, is unthinkable. It makes one feel that the maintenance of a huge police-force is of no use). In Roy's 'Nrimunda Shikari' (The Head Hunter), the newspapers, with reference to police inefficiency (akarmanyata) and their failure to safeguard public life and property, voice the grievances of the citizens – "আমরা ট্যাক্স দিয়ে পুলিশ পুষছি কেন?"<sup>14</sup> (Why are we paying taxes to bear the expenses of the police force?) Such fictional sentiments were echoed by the existing newspapers of the time. The 'Dainik Basumati', Calcutta, dated June 25, 1900 wrote vociferously – "The Criminal Investigation Department is a huge affair and a large amount is spent on it annually and if yet the police cannot put a stop to crimes in the metropolis, why is so much money wasted every year?"<sup>15</sup> In 'Aprilashya Prothom Divas' (The First Day of April), Sundarbabu himself adequately sums up the public opinion of the police — "বাঙালি পুলিশ হচ্ছে 'ফুলিশ জীব'! দেব সহায় না হলে আমরা নাকি কোন মামলায় সফল হতে পারি না!"<sup>16</sup>

(The Bengali police are foolish creatures! Only divine intervention will enable them to successfully resolve a case).

The entry of the 'saviour' sleuth, with his stellar brilliance, appears almost as a matter of 'divine intervention' (daiva sahay) in these narratives, doing the job on behalf of the police, thereby rescuing the latter from disgrace. The detective's success thereby becomes a natural corollary to the incompetence of the police. In 'Rahasyer Alochhaya' (The Chiaroscuro of Mystery, 1944), Roy's protagonist Dr. Dilip Chaudhury sincerely addresses the need for scientific methods of detection in the investigative procedure of the police in Bengal — “পুলিশের অনুসন্ধান কার্যে একজন শিক্ষিত বৈজ্ঞানিকের সাহায্য অত্যন্ত দরকারি”<sup>17</sup> The incompetence of the police has, in fact, been taken to unbelievable heights in several cases. Thus, in 'Jakkhapatir Ratnapuri' (The Yaksha Lord's Jewelled Fort, 1943), a notorious criminal escapes from police custody in broad daylight<sup>18</sup> while in 'Dragoner Dushwapno' (The Nightmare of the Dragon, 1939), a rare artefact is stolen from within the 'thana' (police station) itself.<sup>19</sup> The detective appears in almost every story to help the clueless police solve a complicated case. No wonder, Roy's protagonists enjoy the support and admiration of the colonially nuanced regime of law and order. Thus, in 'Mukh aar Mukhosh' (The Face and the Mask, 1942), Satishbabu, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, eulogizes detective Hemanta as a 'genius'<sup>20</sup> whereas in 'Shani Mangaler Rahasya' (The Saturday-Tuesday Mystery), Sundarbabu glorifies Jayanta as a man of extra-ordinary talent (odbhut pratibhar adhikari) and proclaims himself as his staunch admirer (gora bhakta)<sup>21</sup>. Through such imageries and motifs, the author seeks to negate the

stereotypical racist assumptions of native 'effemenacy' and cultural degeneration that had lingered long within the imperial imagination.<sup>22</sup> This tradition was continued in Roy's post-independence narratives as well – that of resisting the western idealisation of a nation by upholding the native subaltern's urge to develop a distinct national identity through a cultivation of indigenous cultures. It needs to be remembered here that this was the 1940s and a new sub genre of crime-fiction – the 'police procedural'<sup>23</sup> – had already appeared in the West, with the intelligent, well-equipped, competent police-man as the lead character. Roy, however, seems oblivious of such developments. His post-independence narratives continued to be critical of the police. In 'Nrimunda Shikari', the entire police battalion is seen fleeing from the crime-scene like cowards, to save their lives.<sup>24</sup> This was probably because many of the post-colonial law and order personnel continued to harbor a colonial pro-establishment mindset that alienated the common people. As Partha Chatterjee puts it with reference to independent India, “The new state chose to retain in a virtually unaltered form the basic structure of the civil service, the police administration, the judicial system, including the codes of civil and criminal law, and the armed forces as they existed in the colonial period.”<sup>25</sup> Through the detective's professional acumen and dedication, the writer emphasizes the urgent need for a reconstruction of the colonial-era policing to establish the post-colonial police as a dispenser of equitable justice and security.

Hemendra Kumar Roy's detective fiction is conspicuously marked by the portrayal of the police as a lesser force. Its role in enforcing law and order and creating law-abiding citizens is visibly undermined. It is in this void created by the inertia of the state mechanism and its authorised agencies that the detective typically steps in. The law-enforcers repeatedly call him up for assistance – helplessly waiting for the intervention of a rank outsider – to deal with the crime-situation. The sleuth, however, does not work for the police. He intervenes only to capture the criminals and hand them over to the police, with whom rests the ultimate authority to decide the fate of the accused. To validate his protagonist's status as a justice-seeker and a champion of the people, the author refers time and again to the failure of the police to act as credible operatives against crime. At the same time, however, Roy, in his own distinctive style, invents humorous interludes to dilute the intensity of public discontent with the law enforcement agencies. The deficiencies and flaws of the police and the state are thus eclipsed by the fictional detective's success story.

**END NOTES**

(All translations have been made by the present researcher, unless otherwise specified).

1. Orsini, Francesca, *Print and Pleasure – Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India*, Ranikhet, permanent black, 2009, p.9. By the term 'pleasure' Orsini implies "an all-absorbing and obsessive experience that totally overwhelms the reader", *Ibid*, p.22.
2. Orsini, *op.cit.*, p.277.
3. Orsini, Francesca, 'Detective Novels : A Commercial Genre in Nineteenth Century North India', Blackburn, Stuart and Dalmia, Vasudha ed., *India's Literary History : Essays on the Nineteenth Century*, Delhi, permanent black, 2004, p.436.
4. Sen, Sukumar, *Crime Kahinir Kalkranti (An Anthology of Crime Tales)*, Calcutta, Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1988, p. 189. Sen, in fact, calls it 'trishul' or trinity.
5. The term 'babu' is a respectful address for educated Indian men.
6. The Darogha Daptar is the serialized true-crime tales written by the Calcutta Police Detective – Priyonath Mukhopadhyay (1855-1947). The publication of 'Banomali Daser Hatya' (The Murder of Banomali Das), the first of the 206-story strong Darogha Daptar, in April, 1892 is said to have marked the beginning of the formal history of Bengali detective fiction.
7. "Members of a secret brotherhood of robbers and murderers were called 'thags' in Hindustani, meaning deceivers, from the verb 'thag-lava, to deceive. The English eventually called them Thugs ...", Bruce, George, *The Stranglers, The Cult of*

Thuggee and its Overthrow in British India , London, Longmans, p.11. The Thuggees, worshippers of the Hindu Goddess Kali, waylaid their victims, generally travellers, on highways, strangled them and stole their belongings. The thrust of the anti-Thug campaign lay in the protection of human life and private property.

8. Symons, Julian, *Bloody Murder – From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel : A History*, London, Faber and Faber, 1972, p.15.

9. Arnold, David, *Police Power and Colonial Rule, Madras 1859–1947*, New Delhi, Oxford University Publication, p.2, in Dey, Anindita, op.cit., p.105.

10. Pasquino, Pasquale, 'Science of Police in Europe in Eighteenth Century', Burchell, Graham, Gordon, Colin and Miller, Peter ed., *Treatrum Politicum' : the Genealogy of Capital – Police and the State of Prosperity, The Foucault Effect* , Chicago, 1991, pp.105–118.

11. Ibid.

12. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Jayanter Kirti' , Basu, Samudra ed., *Jayanta Manik Samagra* (The Jayanta Manik Omnibus), Vol.1, Kolkata, Dev Sahitya Kutir Pvt. Ltd., 1st ed: January, 2018, pp.13–61, here p.16.

13. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Manush Pisach', *Jayanta Manik Samagra*, op.cit., p.111.

14. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Nrimunda Shikari', Dutta, Geeta and Mukhopadhyay, Sukhamoy ed., *Hemendra Kumar Roy Rachanabali* (The Complete Works of Hemendra Kumar Roy), Calcutta, Asia Publishing Company, Vol.7, 1985, p.134.

15. Report on Newspapers and Periodicals in Bengal, January, 1936, Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, Home Administration, Police.
16. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Aprilashya Prothom Divas', Jayanta Manik Samagra, op.cit., pp.450-456, here p.450.
17. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Rahasyer Alochhaya', Rahasya Romancho Samagra (Mystery Suspense Compilation), Calcutta, Patrabharati, 1st ed: January, 2015, 6th reprint : February 2017, p.655. Roy presents his protagonist Dr. Dilip Chaudhury as an eminent chemist (subikhyato rashayatattwavidh) who helps the police in cases that require a 'medico-legal' approach.
18. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Jakkhapatir Ratnapuri', Rahasya Romancho Samagra, op.cit., p. 674.
19. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Dragoner Dushwapno', Jayanta Manik Samagra, op.cit., p.221.
20. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Mukh aar Mukhosh', Rahasya Romancho Samagra, op.cit., p.22.
21. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Shani Mangaler Rahasya', Jayanta Manik Samagra, op.cit., p.104.
22. T.B. Macaulay , law member of the Governor-General's Council in India from 1834 to 1838, characterised the Bengalis as 'feeble and effeminate', lacking 'courage, independence, veracity' with a mind that was 'weak even to helplessness for purposes of manly resistance', Macaulay, T.B., 'Warren Hastings, Critical and Historical Essays', 3 Volumes, London, Longman, 1843, Vol.3, p.345.
23. The 'police procedural' was initiated by Lawrence Treat in 1945 with his novel 'V as in Victim' featuring the police detective Mitch Taylor. But it was the American author Ed McBain's

'Eighty Seventh Precinct' series that made this sub-genre an important branch of crime fiction.

24. Roy, Hemendra Kumar, 'Nrimunda Shikari', op.cit., p. 146.

25. Chatterjee, Partha, *The Nation And Its Fragments – Colonial And Post colonial Histories*, Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1993, p.95.

# **Women's Resistance Across Time: Sita's 'Bhumipraves' And Nora's 'Door Slam'**

**Anandi Bhanja**

Semester VI, Department of English (Batch 2022-25)

**Debolina Guha Thakurta**

Assistant Professor Department of English

## **Abstract**

Maya Angelou in her poem, 'Phenomenal Woman' writes, "Men themselves have wondered/ what they see in me/ they try so much. But they can't reach/ my inner mystery." It is strange that ages have passed, generations have been born, science and technology have progressed but that inner mystery have remained unresolved. Women have been treated, ill-treated, subjected, objectified, oppressed and beaten either physically or mentally. Their sorrows were neglected, rather negated, their love betrayed and their voices unheard from time immemorial. They have been living a guilt-ridden existence, accommodating themselves with the expectations while immersing their own aspirations forever in that ocean of grief and ignorance that remained for them. Histories, literatures, myths, both their lived experiences and representations have been replete with these stories of marginalisation of women, by both men and women. The perpetrators of the atrocities have

glorified their brutalities in the name of social responsibilities or rituals or virtue or conventions. This paper, thus, shall be exploring through comparison the plight of two women, separated by spatial and temporal differences, but united by their struggle against patriarchy. Their silence and voice—bhumipravesha and the door slam—become their ways of asserting the self. Despite being ideal wives, following the norms of patriarchy, the women are met with disappointment. The husbands for whom they had put their honours at stake, abused their dignity and questioned their worth. Thus, the women fought together to overcome the humiliations inflicted by their patriarchal husbands. This essay offers a cross-cultural analysis of women's resistance, tracing the echoes of their rebellion across time as a shared fight for dignity, voice, and agency.

**Keywords:** feminine/masculine, performance, resistance, patriarchy, agency

## **Introduction**

Women have never won the battle of the sexes. Their intellect, emotion, adaptability, courage, victories, rationality, logic, revolt, non-conformity, independence of thoughts, voicing of the minds, asserting of self have always been scrutinised and questioned by the phallogocentric society. With every passing century, women have been placed in new cages of social norms and patriarchal dictums – so much so that it has become difficult for them to trace their boundaries.

Literature has always been the transgressor of barriers. It has mirrored the societal practice of androcentrism, as well as, the fight of the 'second sex' to assert non-conformity against the cultural and social norms imposed upon them. Across ages and cultures, texts have portrayed the plight of women. Their agony has never receded but their suffering has changed colours with the modernisation of society. However cross-cultural, women's plight and their stories of deprivation, marginalisation have continued to resonate in literatures across cultures, across genres, be it in their lived experiences or representations in fictions. Henrik Ibsen's Nora in his drama, *A Doll's House* is one such character that draws attention not because she aspired to be a good wife but she showed the courage to refuse the conventional sanctity of her husband's home and slam the door behind. Sita in *Ramayana* is the other woman who entered the crevice her mother Earth opened up, a marker of resistance and revolt. It is true that these two women are separated by time, culture, social framework, they are united in the timeless act of defiance against the hegemonic patriarchal order.

### **Theoretical Framework**

"Enough ink has flowed over the quarrel about feminism; it is now almost over: let's not talk about it any more. Yet it is still being talked about" – said Simone de Beauvoir in the Introduction of her seminal work *The Second Sex*. Feminism cannot be overruled unless females are acknowledged as human beings, beyond the confines of the

“eternal feminine”. Sita lives in myth, centuries apart, culturally segregated, and situated in a distinct geopolitical context while Nora is created by a realist playwright mirroring the nineteenth century European society. Yet, their life speaks of the same tale. Their experiences unite in resistance against the patriarchal expectations of being the perfect woman – married, self-sacrificing, and devoted to her roles of a wife and a mother. The following paper challenges these societal norms by aligning itself with the arguments posited by Beauvoir in her seminal work, *The Second Sex*.

Beauvoir argues that women have been socially constructed as the ‘Other.’ They function not as individuals, but as counterparts to the males of society. While ‘otherness’ is necessary for the self to be constituted as the self, in the dynamic relationship between man and woman, it is always the woman who is labelled as the ‘Other’ by the man, who performs as the self. “And she is nothing other than what man decides; she is thus called ‘the sex’, meaning that the male sees her essentially as a sexed being; for him she is sex, so she is it in the absolute... she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other.” (Beauvoir 6). This is precisely how Nora functions as the “Other” to Helmer. She is his private entertainer — a tarantella performer. Her crime, committed to save her husband, threatened his reputation; thus, the Other’s decision challenged the authority of the Absolute. By listening to her conscience, Nora performed as more than a sexed being — and in the

eyes of her husband, that was a crime far more dangerous than forgery.

In the first part of *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir discusses the formulation of the myth of the 'Eternal Feminine.' This archetypal myth gives rise to several others — the myth of the mother, the virgin, the motherland, nature, etc. — that entrap women into being the ideal, rejecting their individuality and identity. Sita of the *Ramayana* has always been idealised. She is the true queen — the self-sacrificing, devoted wife, a muse of chastity and a nurturing mother. Caring for her dignity and social role seemed more an exhibition of masculine virility and prowess, and less a genuine concern. Such observations were validated particularly when she was forced to walk through the burning pyre and prove her chastity. As a woman, her ontological stability rests in her decency and purity, her responsibility as the true mother of the nation can only be fulfilled through her strict adherence to the conventions of motherhood. As a 'queen' she has to be the icon of an ideal woman practising womanhood as defined and codified by the norms. Sita consented to the expectations, knowing that her husband's acceptance by his countrymen depended on her proving herself to be the 'Eternal Feminine' — the mother, and the bearer of a providing and compromising nature. Thus, despite all the disrespect, she obeyed her husband's insensitive, harsh commands — until her self refused to be bashed and torn again and again.

Book II begins with Beauvoir's most famous assertion: "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" (Beauvoir 293). Therefore, women are not born 'feminine,' rather, they are culturally constructed to become one through the process of socialisation. Society, with its norms and codes of conduct, leaves no room for a woman to breathe on her own. Helmer did not let Nora be herself, and nor could Sita live by her own mind. They simply performed their duties, diligent as they were in their tasks assigned to them, yet were stripped off their dignity by the very ones they devoted themselves to. Beauvoir traces the education of women from childhood to adolescence and illustrates how women are forced to accept and remain passive, alienated and eschewed from the active spirit of life that has always been relegated to men – active, lively, vocal. Sita and Nora, both assiduously accomplished their responsibilities until they realised that their self-aggrandisement is primary. To know the self and subsequently to develop agency – these are essential. In this process of knowing the self, Sita offered a silent protest, quietly accepting her fate while Nora slammed the door of her marital house which was once home to her dreams and expectations.

The following essay further explores and illustrates the resistance of these two women against patriarchal domination. United by their struggle against stringent societal norms, Sita and Nora

— though standing centuries apart — are the "made women" of Beauvoir.

### **The Lived Experiences**

The 'little songbird' of Torvald, Nora Helmer devoted her life to her husband and her children's well-being. In an act of desperate love, she forged a signature of her late father to borrow money for Torvald's medical treatment. Torvald cheated death at the cost of Nora's entrapment to Krogstad's constant blackmail. She owed the lender "four thousand eight hundred kroner." Yet she feared not for herself, but for her husband's disgrace. As she confided in Mrs. Linde, "...How awkward and humiliating it would be for Torvald – with his manly self-esteem – to know he owed me something. It would upset the entire balance of our relationship; our beautiful, happy home would no longer be what it is" (Ibsen 122). She ran errands to repay the debt. She abhorred herself, yet believed her husband would protect her. However, her illusion shattered when Torvald claimed her unfit to be a mother and a wife.

Valmiki's Sita is not much talked about in Ramayana. Her journey and her pain, her sacrifice and her declaration, her trust and her agony have found not much space in the grandeur of Rama's victory against Ravana. The adopted daughter of King Janaka, Sita is said to be born of the earth. Married to Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, she fulfilled the role of an ideal wife – so much so that she followed him into exile. Her abduction by Ravana marked the beginning of her vicissitude. Sita was saved from her captivity by her husband, only to be pushed into a burning pyre to prove her sanctity. The fire would not char her if she was chaste.

Not once, but thrice she had to prove to her husband and his countrymen the purity of her body. Although saved, but isn't this act of valour of Rama an example of masculine virility that takes prowess in claiming oneself as protector and care giver of women? Isn't this a story of a frail hero and his virile history?

### **The Weight of the Ring and the Vermillion**

“One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 294) – the line resonates at every moment as we read and re-read the predicament of both Sita and Nora. How Nora Helmer of *A Doll's House*, or Sita of *Ramayana*, or any woman so to say, could escape the training of becoming an ideal wife? A woman's worth is measured on her potential of becoming a perfect wife and mother rather than as individuals, vocal and bold. Their birth determines their destiny. Marriage is their only end, and the husband's home, their only *sanctum sanctorum*. Nora being married to Torvald, she is reduced to sheer property whose movements, personal choices are regulated so much so that she is barred from visiting her ailing and dying father. On the other hand, Nora, well doctored into the hollow values of patriarchy that demands absolute subjection and negation of self-identity, forges her late father's signature only to save her ailing husband. Intriguingly, this was expected out of her i.e. for Nora, her principal allegiance should be towards her husband and her 'holy' marriage. This is convention that a woman should be devoted to her husband and fulfil all responsibilities as a nurturer of the family. Although

stereotype, this is the accepted perception about woman – as a mistress, as a wife and as a mother. To look into Sita's context, her husband has been a divine choice. Rama is chosen by his ability to lift and string Lord Shiva's bow. The single act of strength proved his virtue and his greatness and grandeur. Therefore, he is the obvious and the most desired choice. Sita's consent is never asked for. She, as Beauvoir said, is 'given in marriage to males by other males' (Beauvoir 452). It is Shiva and Janaka who authorised her to be the wife of Rama.

Both the women worked for their husbands, lived on them, and lived for them. Despite being centuries apart, regionally and culturally segregated, their compromises bind them together. Nora contemplated suicide to save her husband's reputation from being tarnished. "Five. Seven hours until midnight. Then twenty-four hours until the next midnight. Then the tarantella's over. Twenty-four plus seven? Thirty-one hours left to live" (Ibsen 164). She counted her hours of life while her husband lived on for her desperate crime, and yet he dared to call her "...a hypocrite, a liar – worse, worse – a criminal! – Oh, the depths of ugliness in all this! Shame, shame!" (Ibsen 178). Torvald prohibits her from being a mother. The fissure in her heart deepens when he says, "You'll go on living here; that goes without saying. But you won't be allowed to bring up the children; I daren't entrust them to you" (Ibsen 179).

"For all of us Indian women carry some of her within us: Sita's strength and her vulnerability," writes Namita

Gokhale in her perceptive essay *Sita: A Personal Journey*. “Sita has been there, in the mass consciousness of our subcontinent, for very long now. She has been there since the beginnings of our timeless history, in the different versions and renditions of the Ramayana, written or recited and never forgotten. She lives on in ... celluloid, and on television... She is there in song, in poetry, in the tears that Indian women have been shedding through generations as they tread the Lakshman rekhas that barricade their lives, as they are consumed by the flames of the penitential agni pareeksha that their families regularly subject them to” (Lal xiii). Sita has been confined to her hut when Lakshman leaves to look for his brother, who has chased the golden deer into the depths of the forest. She is restricted from stepping into the world of greens in the absence of the men of the family. However, her fate is twisted, and she is abducted by the sadhu – the disguised Ravana. The ideal wife of the ancient Indian epic, Sita’s courage, strength, power, and intellect are undermined. Like an ardent devotee, Sita must show her complete faith and dependence on Rama. She has to share the life of an exile as the true ardhanginee and remain the quiet nurturer of the heroic princes of Ayodhya. She longs for Rama, silently enduring the turn of events, Sita remains stern in her belief and sits in the Ashokvanam, waiting for the courageous husband to rescue her. As Virginia Woolf wrote in *Orlando*, ‘as long as she thinks of a man, nobody objects to a woman thinking.’ Sita’s thoughts remain filled with Rama and her trust that she would be salvaged by him. Her husband doesn’t

disappoint her just as he does not disappoint the hegemonic patriarchal norms. Rama ensures that his territory remains sacrosanct even if he has to document Sita's sobriety, innocence and purity, her abstinence and shuddhata through a fiery examination. Divakaruni's Sita says, "Ram's hand tightened around my wrist, his grasp like iron. I knew I'd have a bruise later, but that was the least of my concerns. Stand up against this huge injustice, I wanted to say. But he shook his head, indicating he didn't want me to speak. I obeyed, but in my mind I begged him. Protest. If nothing else, remind your father of his kingly duty to the people of Ayodhya" (Divakaruni 105). Sita's lips are stitched until the very end, until her plea to her Bhumi Devi.

### **Bhumi Pravesh and Slamming the Door – Their Resistance**

*"Helmer: ... But nobody would sacrifice their honour for the one they love. Nora: Hundreds and thousands of women have" (Ibsen186).*

Among these thousands, Sita stands on the burning fire, unscathed. She is proving her chastity to the people of Ayodhya and their King. In doing so, she burns her honour to ashes in order to preserve the honour of the King, her husband. Centuries later, in a distant land, Nora Helmer becomes a criminal to save her husband and contemplates suicide to preserve his honour. Sita's Agnipariksha, as Professor Sutapa Chaudhuri analyses, has a 'subterranean linking' to the 'wife immolation of Sati,' suggesting a

culture that ‘denies life to its women and girl children.... Sita is forced to commit Sati in the Agnipariksha that is also a funeral pyre—the testament of her forced chastity thus connotes the death of her individual freedom as a human being’ (Chaudhuri 100). Not once, but twice, she has been pushed onto the burning pyre. Her husband has killed her repeatedly, reducing her existence to that of a mere wife, with no individuality. In Nora's words, Sita became the ‘doll-wife.’

The wife eventually realizes that her sacred duty is primarily to herself and not to her husband. Thus, while Nora verbalizes the reasons behind her decision to leave, Sita's silence speaks volumes. However, in *The Forest of Enchantments*, Divakurni's Sita says to her husband, ‘If you reject me now, word will travel all across Bharatvarsha, and men everywhere will feel that they, too, can reject a wife who has been abducted. Or even been touched against her will. Countless innocent women—as innocent as I am—will be shunned and punished because of your act. Is that dharma? Is that what you want? ... I accept your priorities and understand why they are so important to you... But I don't agree with you that the private life must be sacrificed for the public one. And that is the final advice that I leave for my children... balance duty with love’ (243–244, 356). She speaks on Rama's incompetence both as a King and as a Husband. She questions dharma and thus reflects upon the hypocrisy of tradition and the moral formation of the great King. Simultaneously, Sita questions the norms of patriarchy that society upholds religiously.

Nora opens her mind to Torvald and questions the fruitfulness of their marriage. She has never had an independent thought. Her choices, decisions, and life have always been dependent on her father and her husband. She blames them for her inability to learn to live her life. She says, 'I've been your doll-wife here, just as at home I was Daddy's doll-child. And the children, they have in turn been my dolls' (Ibsen 183). She has failed to be herself as she tried to become an obedient daughter, a caring wife, and a perfect mother, but she could never truly be her self.

Sita, on the other hand, spent 14 years of her life in Ashokavanam, imprisoned by Ravana. During her pregnancy, she lived in the Ashram and raised her sons alone. Her chastity was questioned not once, but thrice, and never did her husband stand by her and defend her innocence. The third time, when she was subjected to another Agnipariksha in public, in front of her sons, Sita pleaded to the Bhumi Devi. She asked her to take her away if she is pure, if she is chaste, if she is untouched, if she has always remained faithful to her husband. The floor of the courtyard cracked open, and she was pulled into the lap of her mother. Raja Ravi Varma's chilling portrayal of Sita's Bhumi Pravesh distinctly captures the distress in Rama's expression and the agony experienced by Luv and Kush, Sita's sons. However, Rama has failed to be a husband. He mistrusted his wife and proved his inability to govern the country or be a father to his family. While Sita managed both responsibilities with elegance until her dignity was shattered, Rama failed.

Torvald, too, succeeded in securing his family financially but failed in loving them. Before slamming the door, Nora says to her husband that their marriage could have been recovered if "... (We) you and I would have to change ourselves in such a way. Oh, Torvald, I no longer believe in the miraculous... That our living together could become a marriage" (Ibsen188). Nora leaves Torvald, abandoning her children under the care of their father. Like Sita, Nora never doubts Torvald's ability to be a fulfilling father. Both women leave their children and choose their dignity. Their sacred duty, as Nora said, is towards themselves.

### **Inference**

*When the heat of summer becomes unbearable, it is then that the clouds rain water.*

*– Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain*

Both Sita and Nora have been subjugated, manipulated, tortured, dolled up, and shackled by patriarchy. The men in their lives have always pulled the strings, working according to their own needs and comfort. The women's minds have never been freed to think, and at last, when they could, the available alternative was to abdicate themselves not to their fate but to their performance as emblems of chastity and tolerance. Their lives after their departure from a 'stable' nest are not recorded. They have walked out into the crowd of life, free of limitations. Their choice liberated hundreds of women, from different hemispheres, from the

quandaries of the ring and the vermilion. Through their journeys, Sita and Nora narrate the tale of every woman across centuries and across the world who have been threaded to male authority. Their stories have universal appeal. However, they also show the path to freedom. Sita and Nora chose their own ways to sever the leash of patriarchy. They do not dictate the routes of emancipation but become the flicker of light in the journey of other women towards selfhood. Their revolt remains imprinted in the journals of powerful women and their journey to empowerment.

**Works Cited**

Beauvoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex*. Translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany- Chevallier, Vintage Books, 2011. Print.

Chaudhuri, Sutapa. *Revisiting Sita: The Subversive Myths of Womanhood in Contemporary South Asian Women Writers*. The Asian Conference on Literature & Librarianship 2013 Official Conference Proceedings. 2013. Print.

Divakaruni, Chitra Banerjee. *The Forest of Enchantments*. Harper Collins India, 2019. Print.

Gokhale, Namita. "Sita: A Personal Journey." *The Ramayana Revisited: Modernity and Identity in South Asia*, edited by Mandakranta Bose, Oxford University Press, 2004, pp. xiii–xviii. Print.

Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Translated by Deborah Dawkin and Erik Skuggevik, edited by Tore Rem, Penguin Classics, 2009. Print.

Lal, Malashri, and Namita Gokhale, editors. *In Search of Sita: Revisiting Mythology*. Penguin Books India, 2009. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando: A Biography*. Hogarth Press, 1928. Print.

# **Market Incentives vs. Policy Friction: Assessing the Costs of Disjointed Green Credit Guidelines on Corporate Decarbonization Strategy in India**

**Tanisha Todi**

Sem 5, Department of Geography

**Dr Jayati Das**

Associate Professor, Department of Geography

## **1. Abstract**

India's commitment to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070 and establishing 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 necessitates unprecedented private sector investment in decarbonization. To drive this shift, the government has introduced a multi-pronged policy architecture featuring market-based instruments: the compliance-focused Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS) and the voluntary Green Credit Program (GCP). While ambitious, this dual mechanism, coupled with mandatory capital market disclosures under the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (SEBI) Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR), operates within a fragmented institutional landscape. This research assesses how this disjointed structure generates significant "policy friction,"

undermining the efficiency and effectiveness of market incentives.

The central finding is that institutional misalignment—where CCTS is administered by the Ministry of Power (MoP) through the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) and GCP is managed by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) through the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)—prevents capital optimization and increases corporate transaction costs. Further friction arises from SEBI's mandate, which forces the disclosure of the voluntary GCP within the compliance-oriented BRSR framework, extending administrative burdens across corporate value chains.

This policy friction translates directly into measurable economic costs, primarily through the stalling of critical, high-cost capital expenditure (Capex) necessary for the deep decarbonization of hard-to-abate industrial sectors (e.g., steel, cement). Corporate stakeholders cite a lack of clear regulatory frameworks and uncertain returns as the main barriers to investment. Historical precedent, specifically the collapse of the Renewable Energy Certificates (REC) market due to chronic enforcement failure, compounds this market distrust, making long-term investment in new credit systems high-risk.

To unlock the required private capital, this paper recommends immediate institutional harmonization. This includes defining limited fungibility between CCTS and GCP credits, mandating a unified single-window clearance

and reporting system for all green projects, and increasing the regulatory rigor of CCTS targets to generate a reliable price signal. Eliminating policy friction is necessary to ensure that market mechanisms serve as accelerators of the transition, not administrative hurdles.

## **2. Introduction: Policy Ambition, Decarbonization Imperative, and the Problem Statement**

### **2.1. India's Climate Commitment and Economic Reality**

India is simultaneously navigating the imperatives of rapid economic growth and aggressive climate mitigation. The nation has committed to achieving Net Zero emissions by 2070 and dramatically scaling up its clean energy capacity, targeting 500 GW of non-fossil fuel-based capacity by 2030. This ambition faces unique structural challenges: the country's development needs are immense, its energy demand is escalating, and historically, its per capita emissions remain low compared to developed economies. Furthermore, the Indian economy exhibits significant dependence on nature.

The decarbonization pathway demands substantial technological shifts in energy consumption. This shift requires massive capital expenditure (Capex), particularly in energy-intensive, hard-to-abate sectors such as iron and steel, cement, non-ferrous metals, and chemicals. These industrial processes rely heavily on fossil fuels,

drawing roughly 50% of India's natural gas, 25% of its coal, and 20% of its oil. Unlike the power sector, where solar and wind replacements are comparatively straightforward, deep decarbonization in these industrial areas involves expensive, nascent technologies like green hydrogen or carbon capture, meaning capital deployment is particularly sensitive to regulatory certainty.

## **2.2. The Policy Pivot to Market Mechanisms**

Recognizing the scale of the required capital, India has transitioned its climate governance strategy toward market-based instruments designed to minimize abatement costs and maximize private sector participation. This shift builds on precursor schemes like the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) scheme, which focused on industrial energy efficiency. The current framework involves two key instruments notified in late 2023: the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS), a regulatory compliance mechanism for designated industrial sectors, and the Green Credit Program (GCP), a voluntary, market-based mechanism focused on incentivizing environmental actions like afforestation and water conservation.

Financial regulators are also advancing green finance. SEBI's leadership in sustainable finance, particularly through the mandatory BRSR framework introduced in 2021 for the top 1,000 listed companies, has established capital markets as a powerful lever to reorient financial

flows. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are increasingly viewed as foundational actors in the climate transition. This transition must be fast, but also fair—the social impacts of climate action, ensuring protection for workers and vulnerable communities, demand specific regulatory attention.

### **2.3. Defining Policy Friction: The Central Thesis**

Policy friction is defined herein as the economic and administrative cost incurred by obligated and voluntary entities due to inconsistencies, functional overlaps, and institutional misalignment between multiple green credit mechanisms and mandatory reporting guidelines. This study posits that the current Indian policy architecture, while covering the spectrum of compliance and voluntary action, is fundamentally structured as a series of disconnected silos.

A major concern stems from the fact that policy architects have not yet fully integrated critical social requirements, such as mandating specific disclosures on reskilling initiatives for fossil fuel workers or the broader social impact of decarbonization, into the BRSR framework. If these 'Just Transition' elements are introduced later as separate compliance requirements, that will inevitably create yet another layer of policy friction for corporations attempting to align capital market flows with social equity. To prevent this

compounding administrative burden, foundational policy alignment must be achieved now.

**Thesis Statement:** Disjointed regulatory design across distinct credit mechanisms (GCS, CCTS) and overlapping mandatory reporting requirements (SEBI BRSR) generates significant policy friction, driving up non-compliance costs and chilling critical corporate capital expenditure necessary for rapid decarbonization.

#### **2.4. Road Map of the Paper**

The subsequent sections analyze the historical context of market failure in India's green instruments, map the specific points of regulatory fragmentation, quantify the resulting corporate costs and investment delays, and propose actionable recommendations for policy coherence and market stabilization.

### **3. Historical Context and Precedent: The Shadow of Market Failure**

The current policy efforts for CCTS and GCP are not the first market-based instruments deployed in India's energy transition. The history of the Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) mechanism provides a crucial—and cautionary—benchmark for evaluating the structural risks facing the new credit markets.

### **3.1. The Renewable Energy Certificate (REC) Mechanism: A Cautionary Tale**

Launched in 2010–2011, the REC mechanism was designed to provide spatial flexibility in green power generation, offering an alternative valuation channel for the green attribute of electricity. Initially, the mechanism showed promising growth: the renewable certification rate surged from 2% in 2011–2012 to 15% in 2014–2015.

However, this market subsequently failed to sustain itself. Certification rates collapsed to 6% during 2017–2019. This decline culminated in a drastic price reduction, with the REC market hitting an all-time low clearing price of ₹ 115 per certificate during the trading session held on August 28, 2024. This visible, catastrophic market collapse serves as a powerful historical indicator of institutional vulnerability.

### **3.2. Causal Analysis of REC Market Failure**

The primary cause of the REC market failure was not a flaw in the certificate design *per se*, but rather systemic noncompliance with the Renewable Purchase Obligations (RPOs) by power distribution companies (DISCOMs). The enforcement of mandatory purchase targets was weak. This resulted in a failure to create reliable demand, leading to the accumulation of a large inventory of unsold RECs. The market mechanism, intended to incentivize green power, became irrelevant once the fundamental enforcement mechanism broke down.

The problems of target underachievement and noncompliance need to be tackled through deep reforms in the functioning of power distribution companies and not the REC mechanism itself, suggesting that institutional enforcement remains the weakest link in market-based environmental policy in India.

### **3.3. Implications for CCTS and GCS**

The historical failure of the REC market provides compelling empirical evidence that market-based instruments in India are acutely vulnerable to institutional and enforcement failure. This lack of historical price reliability immediately impacts corporate decision-making regarding the new CCTS and GCP markets.

Corporate investment decisions, particularly the large-scale Capex required for deep decarbonization in heavy industry, rely on long-term assumptions (10–20 years) regarding asset value and carbon/green credit price stability. The visible collapse of the REC market makes corporate treasurers inherently risk-averse regarding participation in new Indian credit mechanisms. Companies fear that weak enforcement of mandatory CCTS intensity targets could lead to a scenario identical to the RPO failure, resulting in unmonetizable credits and stranded assets. This lack of trust, stemming from historical policy implementation problems, actively increases the perceived policy friction associated with CCTS and GCP, demanding greater regulatory

coherence and commitment to enforcement from the outset.

#### **4. Regulatory Fragmentation and Institutional Friction**

The policy friction inhibiting efficient capital flow originates fundamentally from the fractured institutional structure established for India's green credit markets. The policy architecture is currently designed as parallel systems, compromising the ability of market signals to operate efficiently.

##### **4.1. Mapping Institutional Silos and Policy Objectives**

India's approach divides compliance and voluntary incentives across separate regulatory and administrative bodies:

1. **CCTS (Compliance)**: The scheme is a compliance mechanism focused on reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions intensity (tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per unit of output). It targets obligated entities, initially covering nine energy-intensive industrial sectors (e.g., aluminium, cement, iron and steel, petrochemicals). The CCTS is administered by the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) under the Ministry of Power (MoP). Each Carbon Credit Certificate (CCC) represents one tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent reduction.
2. **GCP (Voluntary)**: The Green Credit Program, notified in October 2023 under the Environment

Protection Act, 1986, is a voluntary, market-based mechanism aimed at incentivizing "pro-planet" actions like afforestation and water conservation. The GCP is managed and monitored by the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), which operates under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

The institutional friction is immediate: these are two separate, distinct markets administered by entirely different ministries (MoP vs. MoEFCC) with different underlying goals (emissions reduction vs. environmental services). Corporations obligated under CCTS, yet wishing to engage in voluntary actions like afforestation, must navigate and report under two completely non-fungible credit systems, dramatically increasing internal complexity and transaction costs.

#### **4.2. The Multi-Regulatory Compliance Burden: SEBI and BRSR Overlap**

A critical point of friction is the entanglement of the voluntary GCP with the mandatory disclosure norms of the capital markets regulator, SEBI. The BRSR framework mandates ESG disclosure for the top 1,000 listed companies. In a move aimed at mainstreaming the GCP, SEBI included disclosure pertaining to the Green Credit Program under Principle 6 of the BRSR framework, applicable from Financial Year 2024–25.

This mandated inclusion converts a voluntary environmental incentive (GCP, administered by

MoEFCC) into a *de facto* reporting compliance requirement imposed by the capital markets regulator (SEBI). This policy sprawl generates significant jurisdictional overlap. Moreover, BRSR compliance requires listed entities to extend disclosure requirements to their top value chain partners, specifically those comprising 2 per cent or more of purchases or sales, covering up to 75 per cent of the value chain. This dramatically increases the administrative burden for smaller, often unlisted, suppliers and ancillary companies. The regulatory strategy appears to prioritize *coverage* across the value chain over *coherence* in methodology. Companies are consequently diverting resources toward documenting compliance for three major regulatory bodies (MoP/BEE for CCTS, MoEFCC/ICFRE for GCS generation, and SEBI for BRSR reporting) rather than allocating capital directly to abatement technologies.

### **4.3. Administrative Bottlenecks and Transaction Costs**

The fractured regulatory landscape exacerbates administrative hurdles, leading stakeholders to report slow project deployment and high processing costs. The policy system is perceived by some as creating a "hassle to the free flow of capital," which contradicts the very goal of market-based mechanisms—to achieve environmental objectives efficiently.

Analysts and industry representatives have specifically called for a unified "single-window clearance system" to rationalize

the complex process of project registration, particularly for nature-based solutions like AFOLU (Agriculture, Forestry, and Land Use), which are critical components of the GCP. Although digitalization is progressing, with a centralized carbon credit registry and electronic trading platform under development, institutional alignment must define fungibility and administrative flow before the technology is deployed. The ability to use credits generated under the GCS for compliance shortfalls in CCTS is the most critical question of fungibility, and its ambiguity prohibits optimal corporate portfolio management and reduces liquidity across both nascent markets.

Table 5: Institutional and Regulatory Mapping of India's Green Compliance Landscape

Mechanism	Core Mandate	Administrator	Oversight Ministry	Reporting Mandate Intersections
Carbon Credit Trading Scheme (CCTS)	Compliance: GHG Intensity Reduction	Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE)	Ministry of Power (MoP)	Compliance mechanism for designated industry sectors
Green Credit Program (GCP)	Voluntary: Environmental Actions	Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)	MoEFCC	Mandatory disclosure via SEBI BRSR
Business Responsibility & Sustainability Report (BRSR)	Mandatory ESG Disclosure	Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)	Ministry of Finance	Captures CCTS/GCP outputs and value chain ESG metrics
Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs)	Green Attribute Valuation	CERC/State Regulators	Ministry of Power (MoP)	Historical market mechanism marred by enforcement failure

## **5. The Corporate Cost of Uncertainty: Investment Delays and Sub-Optimal Capital Allocation**

The regulatory friction identified in the policy architecture directly translates into measurable economic costs for corporate entities, primarily manifested as high compliance overhead and delayed capital expenditure in high-impact projects.

### **5.1. Translating Regulatory Friction into Economic Costs**

Corporations face high upfront costs in establishing the internal monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems required to track and validate actions across multiple, sometimes contradictory, regulatory regimes (CCTS, GCP, BRSR). This overhead diverts significant resources that would otherwise be allocated to actual abatement technology or process innovation. The cost of environmental non-compliance further compounds these expenses, resulting in legal fines, penalties, potential suspension of operations, and critically, a loss of export and market access, particularly regarding stringent global standards like the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Compliance failure is no longer merely a domestic regulatory risk but an immediate commercial threat to Indian exporters of carbon-intensive goods.

## **5.2. Stalling Critical Capital Expenditure (Capex) Decisions**

The greatest economic cost of policy friction is the stagnation of critical long-term investment, specifically in hard-to-abate sectors. Decarbonization in cement and steel requires multi-billion-dollar commitments over decades. Corporate stakeholders have been unambiguous in identifying the primary barriers to increasing investment in climate solutions: the "lack of a clear regulatory framework" and "uncertain returns on investment."

Firms cannot commit high-cost capital if the policy foundation underpinning the financial returns—the price stability and longevity of credit mechanisms—is unstable or subject to constant redefinition due to overlapping jurisdictions. The investment paradox is acute: while companies acknowledge the urgency of the climate transition, regulatory opacity compels them to postpone critical technological shifts, opting instead to wait for policy stability.

The policy uncertainty also directly undermines the development of high-quality nature-based solutions (NCS). If the GCS, the vehicle for recognizing NCS, is viewed predominantly as a reporting burden mandated by SEBI, rather than a reliable revenue stream, investors will withhold funding from high-quality, long-term afforestation and land-use projects due to the perceived

risk of uncertain policy returns and complex land-related regulatory hurdles.

### **5.3. Weak Market Signals: Assessing Target Ambition**

Beyond structural friction, the ambition embedded within the compliance scheme itself sends weak market signals. Early signs suggest that the initial targets under CCTS may not be aggressive enough to truly drive deep decarbonization. An assessment of a 2030 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)-aligned scenario projects that the Emissions Intensity of Value Added (EIVA) in the manufacturing sector needs to decline by at least 2.53% annually. In comparison, the combined average annual EIVA reduction targeted for the eight initial sectors under CCTS is estimated at a lower 1.68% between 2023–24 and 2026–27.

This friction—the misalignment between necessary intensity reduction and mandated targets—sends a dampening price signal to the market. Low mandated ambition translates to lower projected demand for carbon credits, thereby preventing the market from setting a true cost of carbon that is high enough to incentivise expensive, deep-decarbonization technology adoption in heavy industry.

The consequence of this structure is that it risks incentivising only 'low-hanging fruit' actions, such as marginal energy efficiency improvements or easily measurable GCP actions, instead of the structural,

capital-intensive transitions required for sectors like steel and cement. When administrative compliance costs are high relative to the uncertain monetary return from the credit, businesses prioritize minimal required compliance over maximal actual abatement.

Table 4: Policy Friction Points and Resulting Corporate Decarbonization Costs

<b>Friction Point</b>	<b>Policy Disconnect / Source of Friction</b>	<b>Corporate Cost / Strategic Impact</b>	<b>Relevant Source(s)</b>
Institutional Fragmentation	Separate administrators (BEE vs. ICFRE) for compliance (CCTS) and voluntary (GCP) markets.	Duplication of MRV systems, increased internal resource allocation to policy tracking.	
Reporting Overlap	SEBI mandating GCP disclosure within BRSR, covering complex value	High administrative overhead, compliance costs for unlisted partners, focus shift from action	

<b>Friction Point</b>	<b>Policy Disconnect / Source of Friction</b>	<b>Corporate Cost / Strategic Impact</b>	<b>Relevant Source(s)</b>
	chains.	to documentation.	
Market Uncertainty	Unclear fungibility rules and lack of regulatory stability (historical REC crash precedent).	Delay in long-term, high-cost capital expenditure (Capex) for deep decarbonization in heavy industry.	
Weak Price Signal	Low-ambition CCTS targets relative to national NDC pathways.	Insufficient financial incentive for technology breakthroughs; market risk aversion remains high.	
Administrative Hurdles	Multi-agency project clearance and regulatory complexity.	Slow project deployment, higher transaction costs, demand for single-window	

<b>Friction Point</b>	<b>Policy Disconnect / Source of Friction</b>	<b>Corporate Cost / Strategic Impact</b>	<b>Relevant Source(s)</b>
		clearance.	

**6. Policy Alignment and Stabilization: Recommendations for Coherence**

To overcome the economic drag caused by policy friction, immediate and decisive institutional reforms are necessary. The goal must be to transform the disjointed credit guidelines into a unified, stable ecosystem that provides the necessary long-term financial signals for private capital deployment.

**6.1. Establishing Institutional and Credit Fungibility**

The current separation of CCTS and GCP administration by different ministries (MoP and MoEFCC) must be functionally minimised. A critical first step is the creation of a centralised National Green Registry that manages the tracking, verification, and issuance of both Carbon Credit Certificates (CCCs) and Green Credits (GCs).

More importantly, policy must define clear rules for credit fungibility. While CCTS integrity must be maintained as the primary compliance mechanism, allowing obligated CCTS entities to offset a defined,

small percentage (e.g., 5–10%) of their compliance shortfall using verified GCs would achieve two vital goals. First, it would provide an essential, reliable floor demand for the voluntary GCP market, signalling its long-term viability and attracting private investment to environmental services. Second, it would introduce flexibility for corporations to optimise their abatement portfolio across compliance and voluntary actions, thereby reducing overall frictional costs and promoting efficient capital flows.

## **6.2. Streamlining Compliance and Reporting**

The administrative burden stemming from duplicated reporting across multiple agencies must be eliminated. This requires implementing a unified, digital **Single-Window Clearance Platform** for all green projects, leveraging existing digital infrastructure (such as the DILRMP). This platform, which could be termed the Digital Green Compliance Platform (D-GCP), must serve as the sole interface for project registration, methodology validation, real-time MRV, and credit issuance for both CCTS and GCP activities.

Furthermore, the SEBI BRSR mandate requiring GCP disclosure should be simplified by mandating automated data transfer from the unified D-GCP to the BRSR filing structure. This would eliminate the need for corporations and their value chain partners to establish redundant auditing and reporting systems for what is essentially the same underlying environmental

action, thus reducing the administrative cost burden that currently restricts capital investment.

### **6.3. Enhancing Market Credibility through Enforcement and Price Stability**

The historical collapse of the REC market was primarily an enforcement failure. For CCTS to succeed, enforcement of mandatory targets must be robust, predictable, and timely. Penalties for non-compliance must be set high enough that purchasing credits or investing in high-cost abatement technology is unambiguously the more economically rational choice for obligated entities.

Regulatory authorities also need to evaluate the CCTS targets (currently showing a 1.68% EIVA reduction) against the required pace of decarbonization to meet India's NDC pathway (estimated at 2.53% annual reduction for manufacturing). Increasing the ambition of these compliance targets is crucial to generating a strong, reliable price signal necessary for incentivizing the requisite private capital deployment. Furthermore, to stabilize the nascent carbon market and mitigate investor fear stemming from the REC price collapse, regulators should consider introducing a transparent price floor for CCCs, managed through a mechanism such as a buffer reserve, ensuring market stability for long-term investors.

#### **6.4. Integrating Just Transition Indicators into Compliance**

To pre-empt future policy friction related to social equity, the regulatory frameworks must integrate 'Just Transition' principles now. Current SEBI BRSR disclosures lack explicit indicators regarding the social impact of decarbonization, such as reskilling initiatives for fossil fuel workers. Integrating internationally recognised metrics related to inclusive and just transition into the BRSR framework ensures that capital market flows align not just with environmental targets, but also with long-term economic justice, making the policy framework more resilient against future social challenges that could necessitate costly regulatory pivots.

### **7. Conclusion and Future Research Direction**

The findings suggest that the current architecture of India's green credit guidelines, characterised by institutional fragmentation and reporting overlaps, generates policy friction that is functionally equivalent to an increase in the cost of decarbonization technology. While the market incentives offered by CCTS and GCP are conceptually strong, their disjointed deployment across three regulatory domains (MoP/BEE, MoEFCC/ICFRE, and SEBI) prevents the efficient functioning of the market and stalls vital, long-term capital expenditure. The risk premium demanded by investors due to this policy uncertainty—exacerbated by the historical failure of the REC

mechanism—is the single greatest impediment to rapid decarbonization in heavy industry.

The ability of India to meet its ambitious climate goals hinges on resolving this institutional dissonance. Recommendations for a unified National Green Registry, defined credit fungibility rules, robust enforcement of CCTS targets, and the implementation of a single-window Digital Green Compliance Platform are essential steps toward minimising administrative complexity and stabilising price signals. The policy mandate must shift focus from simply increasing the scope of regulation (e.g., BRSR value chain coverage) to achieving genuine regulatory coherence, thereby unlocking the full potential of private capital for the green transition.

Future research should focus on quantifying the specific administrative costs incurred by listed companies, particularly mid-tier entities, under the newly mandated GCP disclosure within the BRSR framework, to empirically measure the economic impact of reporting overlap. Furthermore, detailed econometric modelling is required to assess the correlation between the current CCTS target ambition (1.68% annual EIVA reduction) and anticipated levels of private sector capital deployment necessary to achieve full alignment with India's long-term Nationally Determined Contributions. Only by rigorously measuring and systematically eliminating policy friction can India ensure its market mechanisms deliver the rapid, large-

scale decarbonization required for its 2070 Net Zero commitment.

## **8. Bibliography**

1. Carbon Pricing in India – PIB
2. MIT study: Getting the carbon out of India's heavy industries – IAMC
3. How India's financial regulators can align climate action with social equity
4. India's at-risk economy needs more natural climate solutions – The World Economic Forum
5. Green is the New Gold: The Growing Demand for Carbon Credits in India – Energetica India
6. 428 Corporate Sustainability Initiatives Reporting: A study of India's most valuable companies<sup>1</sup> – IIM Bangalore
7. General Environmental Non-Compliances by Indian Manufacturing Sector, Especially Red Category Industries.