

ধৰিত্ৰী DHARITRI

Vol. I, May, 2026

A Bilingual Multidisciplinary
Peer-Reviewed Research Journal



Chief Editor -
Dr. Chabi Gogoi

Editors-
Daisy Rani Doley
Rijumoni Das

Published by -
Women's Studies and Development Cell
Namrup College
Namrup

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GUIDELINES FOR THE AUTHORS

1. 'Dharitri' Research Journal is a bilingual research journal published in both Assamese and English. The journal features research articles and papers that contain original research works of a high standard.

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Keywords : It should contain 4 to 10 key terms related to the work, separated by commas.

Introduction : It should represent the significant background, provide a brief survey of previous works, outline the purpose and scope of the research, and highlight the novelty of the work without using subheadings.

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Results and Discussion : It should summarize the research, results, interpretations, speculations, and assessments of future research or prospects.

Conclusion : The text should encompass the results of the research, significant findings, and the researcher's perspectives.

Acknowledgements (if any) : It should include brief information regarding any research grant support or the assistance provided by colleagues or institutions.

References/Sources : References should be arranged at the end of the manuscript in the order of their appearance in the text. They must follow the MLA/APA Citation Style.

4. After receiving the research papers, they will be sent to the peer review team for approval. The papers will not be published without the team's approval.

5. The Editorial Board has the final authority to accept or reject a paper and to make revisions to the articles.

6. Authors will be solely responsible for factual accuracy of their contribution.

Editorial

The Supreme Court of India, under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, has recognized the proper management of women's health and menstrual conditions as a fundamental right of women. This historic verdict was delivered in the case of Dr. Jaya Thakur vs. Government of India and others. This recognition has opened the way for women to access all necessary facilities to live a life with dignity, considering menstrual health as central to the right to life, dignity, and bodily autonomy. According to the Supreme Court's decision, all educational institutions are directed to provide free sanitary products, functional gender-specific bathrooms and toilets, and safe disposal facilities for used pads. The Supreme Court's judgment has also directed changes in structures that create obstacles for women in maintaining equality with men in the competitive journey of life. This judgment will initiate a revolutionary change in the field of gender equality and social justice.

Generally, in the context of equal rights for men and women, there is a tendency in many cases to overlook women's menstrual health. No matter how many directives the law and courts issue, many people still fail to empathize with women's natural health issues due to the influence of patriarchal mentality. A large number of women also manage their bodies through unscientific customs rather than scientifically based care. This poses a significant challenge to the respect for women's physical and mental health. In particular, instead of considering menstruation as a natural physiological process of the body, it has been codified under the term 'chubo nowara' (untouchable). During this time, a balanced diet, a clean and hygienic environment, and a little break from work are necessary until the body returns to normal. This support is needed in educational institutions, workplaces, social settings, and even at home. In reality, however, mostly only a ritualized image is reflected. It is hoped that, considering women's health and the dignity of life, this historic verdict of the Supreme Court will progressively complement the thinking of both men and women.

The Women's Studies and Development Cell of Namrup College is planning to convert its biennial magazine Dharitri into an annual journal

starting from the year 2026. This transformation has been undertaken keeping in mind the demands of the current educational revolution. We sincerely express our gratitude to all the knowledge seekers who have contributed valuable research articles to enrich the pages of Dharitri. The courage for this journey came from the inspiration and permission of Dr. Durga Prasad Gogoi, Principal of Namrup College. We respectfully extend our gratitude to him. Heartfelt thanks are also due to Assistant Professor Daisy Rani Doley from the Department of English and Rijumoni Das from the Department of Assamese for shouldering the responsibility of editing and diligently taking care of all the necessary tasks. We extend heartfelt gratitude to the members of the Advisory Board and the editorial board for their valuable assistance.

We extend our gratitude to Nipan Saikia, owner of Axomi Printing Press, and to each and every staff member of the press for carrying out the printing work of this respected journal.

*Dr. Chabi Gogoi
Chief Editor, Dharitri*

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Voice of the Voiceless : Kamala Das's "An Introduction"

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Abstract

This paper examines Kamala Das's poem An Introduction as a powerful articulation of the "voice of the voiceless," and situates it within feminist and subaltern discourse. Drawing on Simone de Beauvoir's idea that "one is not born but rather becomes a woman" and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's interrogation of whether the subaltern can speak, the paper argues that Das's poetry embodies both the silencing and the assertion of marginalized female subjectivity. It explores how patriarchal structures deny women agency over language, body, desire, and identity, rendering them subaltern within both colonial and postcolonial contexts.

Key words : patriarchy, women, marginalization, subaltern.

Introduction

"One is not born but rather becomes a woman" - Simone de Beauvoir.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her famous essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" points out the ability and inability of the subaltern to speak about their issues in their own voices. Kamala Das's poem, "An Introduction," is also the voice of the subaltern where Kamala Das speaks for the suppressed gender. In critical theory subaltern is a social group who are socially, politically and geographically outside their hegemonic power status of the colony and their colonial homeland. It is in a way the subject of exploitation and suppression. "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". It is not only colonialism that silence the subaltern, but also those of us who are watching the operation taking place around the world. Devaluing women's knowledge, importance and status sums up different degree of subalternity. Women like the poor or uneducated are treated unfairly and their voice is considered unimportant. Subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank," person or group of persons in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation. Later on the term has been used by many subaltern thinkers like Homi K. Bhabha to denote the marginalised or subordinate people, oppressed minority groups, lower class, weaker sex, women etc. The subaltern is always suppressed and exploited by those who have power. Just because of their gender women's voice is considered trivial. But they

need to be heard the question is, are they heard? As they are deprived of power "they cannot speak," as Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak answers to her own question raised in her essay "can the subaltern speak?" the subaltern has a voice borne along with their agony and suffering that is expressed in their attitude, manners and speech and often burst out in the form of rebellion. "To do a thing," or "to speak for them," means to bring their voice out as Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak, said in an interview with Leon De Cock.

Discussion

Kamala Das as a poet voiced women's struggle to break free of the male defined gender roles that confined her to a secondary position. Kamala Das with her unusual voice a voice which is bold and strong is different. Her voice gives a voice to the otherwise voiceless gender. In Kamala Das's "An Introduction," the poet voices the subaltern's issues in her bold and frank tone making clear of their predicament in this patriarchal society where women are mere subaltern - not to be heard. The poem abounds in rebellious voice of a woman in the society where they are considered as ignorant and inferior to man. Though they are educated yet the norms of the society possess as a barrier not allowing them to pursue their aim freely. Kamala Das talks of the language in which a woman writes. Even that she cannot choose according to her wish. Though equal opportunity in education is given to a woman, the hypocrisy of the society is revealed when they want their women to be uneducated and even if by mistake they are must not write and even if they write, must not write in English. Society has always tried to marginalize women and not let them have the same space as men. Kamala Das on the other hand writes in English for she feels that it is an individual's right to use any language that he or she is comfortable with. This breaking of the norms of the patriarchal society gives us a glimpse of the rebellious voice of the subaltern. According to her a poet should write in that language which is natural to him or her so as to bring out the best in the self. For her English is as natural as roaring to lions and cawing to crows.

Kamala Das is noted for her boldness in talking of such issues which otherwise are always kept under cover. She takes up the issue of love and sexual desire which is a basic instinct of all human beings. But a woman unlike men cannot aspire for it openly as it considered a taboo for her to do so. She points out that this basic desire is denied to women and they also have to face many betrayals in the quest for love. This quest makes them vulnerable to patriarchy or to a life or constant threat of unruthedness. In most of Kamala Das's poems this quest for love of a woman leads her to men's loveless lust, which shatters her desire for pure love. "When I asked for love...and closed the door." In the poem Kamala Das marries at a tender of sixteen and face so many problems both mentally and physically. It is a norm in the Indian society for the girls to marry early or they might not be able to find good husbands. The age of the men doesn't matter but the girl has to be young. Kamala Das rebels against this norm saying that such marriages are nothing but marital rape committed on the girl. This act of unwanted sexuality totally distorts a women's physic and affects the growth of her personality.

A feeling of contempt takes root in her personality making her hate her gender. In the poem the poet feels marginalized and it also made her to hate herself and her femininity. Throughout her poetic career she had been sincerely exploring the possibilities of love and admiration. This can be gathered from the tribute paid to Kamala Das by Vijay Nambisan that was published in the literary review of "The Hindu." He writes: Kamala Das needed adoration, she needed to be needed. She needed to be loved. Kamala Das's, "An Introduction," is autobiographical poem, where the loud protest of a married woman suppressed in a male dominated society can be heard. Her marriage proved a failure because of her husband's un-emotional mechanical way of performing the sexual act with her but denying to her the love and affection which every woman expects from her husband and the warmth of which brings not only this disappointment but also misery and even torture. Kamala Das is generally seen in the forefront of such writers who fought for the rights of the women. She strongly protests against women's victimization. Her protest is directed against the injustices to which women in India have always been subjected. She thought herself to be one of the victims of the prevalent orthodox attitude towards the Indian woman and of male domination over them. In the writings of Kamala Das, isolation of individuals especially the females is a common theme. She has always felt alienated from her husband and also from other men whom she had relationships with. She felt alienated from society at large, because society makes it possible for the Indian men to dominate over the Indian women. When she speaks of love outside marriage, she is not actually propagating adultery and infidelity but merely searching for a relationship which gives love and security.

The key lesson that is burnt into a woman's psyche during the process of woman-making is that woman as a sex are inferior to men who are the first sex, and the lords of creation. This notion of female inferiority which is apparently based on sexual differences but is actually a myth designed to justify the unequal relations between persists even today, when mankind has moved into the twentieth first century. The way a woman behaves is also governed by a patriarchal society crossing which may make her labelled as a characterless woman. When the poet after her bitter sexual experience of marriage thinks of changing her gender she behaves like. But the society doesn't accept it as it is against the social norms of the society. Kamala Das rebels against this to make the voice of the subaltern to be heard by the world. To deviate from the stereo type women as designed by the society makes her to be termed as bad women. She cannot break free from the boundaries of this so-called patriarchal system. Identity crisis and frustration are the main issues of the subaltern. They try to voice the injustice that are done to them so that the world may do them some justice. 'An Introduction' is a poem which shows the poet's quest for identity and fulfilment. It explains the problems faced by women due to gender discrimination which can only be diminished if men become more aware of this structure called patriarchy.

Kamala Das in 'My Story,' forcefully analysis's "The Politics of Gender," that subtly

undermine the rights and even the identity of women. Her personal outpourings show the need for women to empower themselves by breaking the shackles of gender. Her writing deal with the things of women's revolt and the interrogations of the processes of their subjectivity as it is places in frankly male-female power relations. The politics of gender is that control and the creation of the "Other." The poet's ignorance of politics shows the perceived general ignorance of women about politics. It is an injustice as examined by Feminist Epistemology, that the concept of knowledge is influenced by gender. It is the outcome of the patriarchal society that women cannot understand or have a lesser knowledge of some subjects like science, law, technology and politics. It is a general notion that such subjects are masculine and are meant only for men. Women's knowledge in these subjects is limited. The memorised names of the rulers in a country in a chronological manner is depicted by the poet to show that women knowledge is limited to only memorising things. This ignorance creates the notion that politics doesn't play a role in a women's life, while ironically a greater system of gender politics is at play. Kamala Das points out how society wouldn't let a woman lead her life according to her wish. She has to enact the role of a traditional stereotypical woman. She could be a wife, a cook or a house keeper but she cannot be herself, an individual. Despite equal opportunities of education and economic independence women have always remained a victim of domestic injustice within or outside the family because of the internalisation of patriarchal values women never questions anything and in a way supports the oppression of their own gender. Not only men but women too oppresses women in this society governed by the patriarchal norms. Gender discrimination is also portrayed in the poem by Kamala Das when she calls herself an Indian who is brown. Women in India should not have a brown complexion which disqualifies her from the prospects of a good marriage. Writers like Kamala Das is sensitive to these issues and so voices them in their words. Kamala Das has been unusual in her approach and dealing. While bringing out the unravished scenario to the forefront she unravels something that the earlier generation hesitated to share. In this process her voice discards the dominance of male ego, and introduces the readers to the dark pits and the hypocrisies of sense-ridden society that targets the fair sex only. Women's marginalisation has ever been a complex issue in human history as a whole. She tries to point out the way women are treated in this patriarchal society in every phase of their life. They are oppressed marginalized and are always considered inferior to the men folk. This discrimination that women are treated as subaltern are very well voiced by women writers in their works and Kamala Das, "An Introduction," is a fine example of it. Male writers consciously or unconsciously doesn't take much notice of these issues and so in a way supports these norms. Gender discrimination is like any other discrimination of the other subalterns who do not have a voice in what they do, wish or lead their life. Women therefore fall under the umbrella of subaltern for whom all rules are made by others and are considered as inferior to men.

Kamala Das is a bilingual author of fiction in Malayalam and poetry in English. But in

temperament who has published approximately two hundred and ten poems. To criticise her poems in a balanced manner, her own insights are to be included. She has said in her 'From the Diary,' that of her experience in Kerala and Mumbai, the former denied her freedom of writing and the latter denied her spiritually. According to her the driving impulse of her writing was not so much her mother and grandmother who were writers too but the desire to reinvent the primal myth that 'I am different. I am entity' and to unwrap 'the whatness of one within' from 'all layers of shan grown like skins.' One could say of her what Anne Stevenson has said of Carol Rumors as a poet - 'she retains her feminine voice but excites her sympathies beyond feminism.' There is always a combined trace of absence satisfaction and desire for empowerment in her poetry. Meena Alexander sees Kamala Das poetry as a 'constant reinvention of identity that she believed in ... gathering up of words to create a self. It was not just the body in its tumult that gripped her imagination with the living body comes language. Kamala Das poetry is confessional, expression of what she feels in her real life, how she rebelled against the gender discrimination, the voice of a subaltern allowing language to let her emotions and feelings flow. Kamala Das projects herself as a fervent feminist voice always exacting for a dignified place of honour a respect for the naturalistic freedoms and choices. Kamala Das in her effort to discover her own self, unknowingly shook the norms of a male dominated society. According to her modern women need freedom, self respect and they are prepared to shoulder responsibility. Her writings are a vehicle to bring out the suppressed tensions in the minds of women's who are reluctant to speak. Man-women relationships as the poet feels cannot endure because all man wants is a woman and all woman wants is love. In the poem she says in him...the hungry haste of reverse in me... the oceans timeless waiting.

Conclusion

Kamala Das 'An Introduction,' though is a poem which is full of autobiographical elements is universal as it depicts the predicament of women, especially Indian women to a great extent. She is noted at an international level for her honesty and exploration of hidden emotions of a female mind. Her poems are full of pathos and suffering in a women's life. The tone of her poems is frank and bold carrying a very iconoclastic fervour with which she communicates a powerful female sensibility in her poems. Her 'An Introduction,' is a poem where she brings to the foreground many angles of a women's sufferings and the constraints and restrictions they had to face in this patriarchal society. Women are always deprived of equal status with men and that they are always considered inferior is clearly depicted in the poem. Even the most not spoken issues about women have been articulated with such ease and comfort that it looked very natural for those lines to be a part of the poem. She negates the taboo related to the description of a women's pubic hair and her sexual maturity. In 'The Second Sex,' Simone de Beauvoir tells a story of how a woman's attitude towards her body and bodily functions changes over the years and how society influences this attitude. She argues that women come to accept the meanings a patriarchal society accords them and her biological condition becomes

a handicap for her. This gives growth to her inferiority complex and in the poem Kamala Das even begins hating herself for being a woman. This attitude is imbibed in every mind set of the women of our society because of the internationalisation of the patriarchal values. But Simone de Beauvoir clearly pointed out in her book that, 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman.' The society makes and lays down the rules which she cannot violate without being termed as a rebel. These are the issues which Kamala Das articulates in her poems. The voice of the subaltern tries to talk about how they are cheated by the main stream. They are used and then discarded in the poem, the poet feels exploited and cheated by civilisation in every phase in her life - marriage, ambition, desire to lead a free life. Her true identity is crushed by the dominant and oppressive patriarchal culture which pushes and assigns her place away from the centre to the periphery and even beyond that. In 'An Introduction,' reflects the struggle for selfrealisation and the quest for identity. She boldly voices the suppressed feelings of this marginalised class breaking through the threshold of silence of women in this patriarchal society. She expresses the protests and the resistances of women and their sufferings. The voice in the poem is that of a liberated woman who is striving to search for the self not in terms of personal relationships but as an individual human being. Kamala Das as a feminist speaks about many unspoken angles of a woman's sufferings in a tone that is bold and frank to make the voice of at least one group of subalterns to be heard. A feminist work of literature is a work where language imagery is employed to impart a new vision of reality which is perceived from a women's mode of seeing feeling and measuring her existence without subscribing to the male cultural codes. In literature feminism awakened interest in women's writing as women are the best judges of how, why and where they have been marginalised or discriminated against. Women poets' write with an intention of breaking the centuries old silence and crossing the patriarchal threshold.

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New Labour Laws 2025 and Social Security for Women

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Abstract :

Labour law holds a significant place in a country's legal system because it protects workers against exploitation. Since gaining independence, the government of India has established numerous laws to safeguard laborers. However, these laws are often subject to changes and modifications over time. Recently, the government announced new labour regulations aimed at providing social security specifically for women. We aim to highlight some key points of the new labor laws regarding women.

Keywords : Labour, women, law, social, security.

Introduction :

Labour law holds a significant place in a country's legal system because it protects workers against exploitation. Since gaining independence, the government of India has established numerous laws to safeguard laborers. However, these laws are often subject to changes and modifications over time. Recently, the government announced new labour regulations aimed at providing social security specifically for women

India's workplace regulations have undergone a significant transformation with the introduction of new labor laws. These reforms combine 29 older acts into four labor codes, aimed at enhancing transparency, simplifying compliance, and ensuring stronger protections for workers. The foundation of these new labor laws modernizes wages, social security, safety, and industrial relations.

The four labor codes include: the Code on Wages (2019), the Industrial Relations Code (2020), the Code on Social Security (2020), and the Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code (2020). Together, these codes represent a major step toward creating a more inclusive, safe, and supportive work environment.

These codes feature progressive provisions for equality, maternity benefits, workplace safety, and representation in decision-making bodies, aligning labor regulations with the needs of today's economy. The new laws legally prohibit gender discrimination and ensure equal pay for equal work.

Under the updated labor laws, women are permitted to work night shifts and in all types of employment, including underground mining and operating heavy machinery, provided

they give consent, and there are mandatory safety measures in place. Additionally, women's representation in grievance redressal committees is now mandatory. The definition of family for women employees has also been expanded to include parents-in-law, thereby increasing dependent coverage and promoting inclusivity.

Objectives of the study :

1. To study the New Labour Laws 2025 and Social Security for Women.

Methodology :

The study is based on qualitative research and is descriptive in nature. The data and information were collected from secondary sources. Secondary information is collected from books, journals, magazines, and online library.

Discussion :

The following provisions outline the key benefits extended to women under the new Labour Codes :

Representation of Women in the GRC: The Industrial Relations Code 2020 mandates adequate representation of women on the Grievance Redressal Committee (GRC), not less than their proportion in the establishment's total workforce.

- Ensures women workers have a fair voice in workplace dispute resolution.
- Women's perspectives help address issues more comprehensively and sensitively.
- Women employees feel more secure raising concerns when represented by peers.
- Matters such as workplace harassment, maternity rights, and safety can be better handled.
- Balanced representation fosters fairness, reducing discrimination and conflicts.

Maternity Benefits : As per the Code on Social Security, to be eligible for maternity benefits, a woman must have worked in an establishment for at least 80 days in the 12 months immediately preceding the expected delivery. Eligible women receive maternity benefits equal to their average daily wages for the duration of the leave. The maximum period of maternity leave is 26 weeks, of which up to 8 weeks may be taken before the expected date of delivery. Additionally, a woman who legally adopts a child below three months of age, or a "commissioning mother" (a biological mother who uses surrogacy), is entitled to 12 weeks of maternity benefit from the date of adoption or from the date the child is handed over.

Work from home: In case the work assigned to a woman is of such a nature that she may work from home, the employer may allow her to do so, after availing of the maternity benefit for such period and on such conditions as the employer and the woman may mutually agree.

Simplification of certification for proof of delivery, etc.: Proof of maternity-related conditions, such as pregnancy, delivery, miscarriage, medical termination of pregnancy, tubectomy operation, or illness arising from such events, may now be furnished through a form issued by:

- a registered medical practitioner,
- an accredited social health activist (ASHA),

- a qualified auxiliary nurse, or
- a midwife.

This provision, under the Code on Social Security, simplifies the certification process, which under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, can only be obtained from a registered medical practitioner, a hospital, or a midwife.

Medical bonus : If the employer does not provide free pre-natal confinement & post-natal care, the woman is entitled to a medical bonus of Rs. 3,500. Provision of Nursing breaks. After resuming duty post-childbirth, a woman is entitled to two breaks during her daily work for nursing the child until the child attains the age of 15 months.

Crèche facility : In every establishment where 50 or more workers are employed, there must be a crèche facility either separate or common within a prescribed distance. The employer must allow the woman four visits to the crèche per day, including rest intervals. This provision-under Code on Social Security and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions, 2020-supports working women with children below the age of 6 years. Crèche facilities support working mothers by enabling childcare at the workplace, helping women balance work and family.

Boost to female labor force participation : Women workers can work in all establishments for all types of work. They may also work at night, i.e., before 6 a.m. and beyond 7 p.m, with their consent, and the employer is required to make adequate arrangements for their safety, facilities, and transportation. Allowing women to work across all establishments, including night shifts with necessary safety measures, promotes gender equality, expands employment opportunities, and supports higher female participation in the workforce.

Prohibition of Gender Discrimination : Employers shall not discriminate on ground of gender in matters relating to recruitment, wages, or conditions of employment in respect of the same work or work of a similar nature done by employees. Such a provision under the Code on Wages, 2019:

- Ensures equal pay for equal work, removing unfair wage disparities based on gender.
- Expands protection to cover not just wages, but also recruitment and employment conditions, ensuring fairness throughout the employment.
- Promotes workplace equality, giving women and men the same opportunities in hiring, pay, and treatment.

Women's Representation on Advisory Boards : One-third of the members in the Central/State Advisory Board shall be women. The Central/State Advisory Board shall advise on the fixation or revision of minimum wages, providing increasing employment opportunities for women, the extent to which women may be employed in such establishments or employments. This ensures women's voices in policy-making, leading to more inclusive and balanced employment policies. It helps design policies that increase employment opportunities for women, promoting gender equality in the labour market.

Conclusion :

In conclusion, by consolidating 29 outdated laws into four comprehensive codes, India is transitioning to a labor ecosystem that promotes both economic growth and worker welfare, while laying the groundwork for a futuristic, digitally enabled, and inclusive workforce. The new labor laws are expected to be fully implemented by April 2026. These laws will legally prohibit gender discrimination and ensure equal pay for equal work.

Under the new regulations, women may work night shifts in all sectors, provided they consent and the necessary safety measures are in place. Additionally, women's representation in grievance redressal committees is now mandatory. If all provisions of the new laws are effectively applied, the participation of women in the workforce will be significantly encouraged.

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Work-Life Balance of Working Women and Mental Health

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Abstract

Work-life balance is widely recognized as a critical determinant of mental well-being, particularly for women who often manage professional responsibilities alongside disproportionate unpaid domestic and care giving work. In the contemporary globalized economy, women's participation in the workforce has increasingly shifted from being a matter of choice to an economic necessity. However, this transformation has not been matched by an equal redistribution of domestic roles and responsibilities within households. As a result, many working women experience a "dual burden," simultaneously fulfilling the expectations of an "ideal worker" in the professional sphere and an "ideal caregiver" in the private sphere. This paper explores the multidimensional concept of work-life balance, its factors and significant impact on the mental well-being of working women, with particular reference to the Indian context. Drawing on sociological perspectives and recent empirical studies, the research highlights how inadequate work-life balance contributes to develop the levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and burnout.

Key words : *Work-Life Balance, Mental Well-being, Working Women, India, Psychological Distress.*

1. Introduction :

The desire for a better work-life balance has become one of the growing concerns in contemporary society. Women's lives are often shaped by multiple, overlapping roles-as professionals, mothers, caregivers, wives, and daughters. Much of women's time is consumed by socially imposed duties rather than consciously chosen priorities. As a result, women frequently end up prioritizing everyone else's needs while postponing their own health, rest, and personal aspirations. Work-life balance is a multi-dimensional concept that defines the equilibrium an individual seeks between their professional obligations and their personal life, including family, health, and leisure. WLB entails adjusting work patterns to accommodate responsibilities like childcare or eldercare. In India, balancing professional and personal lives remains a pressing discourse. Working individuals navigate dual roles, but work stress often spills over, affecting family, organizations, and society. This problem is worse by high-performance pressures in many professional fields and by economic factors like falling income, slow growth, and layoffs. A notable gap is the lack of WLB accommodations, particularly

burdensome for women as primary family caretakers. These stressors foster fatigue, errors, injuries, and absenteeism. Work and personal life form two sides of the same coin.

Evidence on Work-Life Imbalance among Indian Women :

The Indian Institute of Management Ahmadabad (IIMA) study, which surveyed over 2000 working women across various sectors in India, revealing significant work-life imbalance challenges. 67% of women report struggling with work-life balance reflecting pervasive stress and conflict between job and home responsibilities. In the same study, 53% felt guilty about not spending enough time with family, and 60% of working mothers cited pressure from both work and home as a source of mental fatigue. 48% cited workplace culture as a major contributor to stress and imbalance. All working women experience various obstacles in their personal as well as professional life. Women are struggling to balance between work-life which ultimately hampering their social life. While trying to balance their work-life, they feel pressure. Since women need to play different roles in society it became harder for women to keep balance between person and professional life.(Times of India 23rd September 2024) During the COVID-19 pandemic, sectors across the country saw work-from-home arrangements compound pressures for women. A survey of 2,500 Indian professionals showed that 61% of women felt conflicted between home and work duties, and 43.7% said their work-life balance worsened due to added housework and care responsibilities. Gender Differences in Stress and Mental Health Studies on workplace stress highlight that Indian women experience higher levels of stress than men.

According to the Your Dost survey'2024 (mental health platform) reported that about 72.2% of female respondents experienced high stress levels, compared to 53.64% of men. Moreover, societal stigmas around mental health often prevent women from seeking help, and data suggests that women constitute a significant proportion of mental health struggles in India. These figures underscore the intersection of work-life balance struggles and broader mental health outcomes. In contemporary society, the pursuit of better WLB has emerged as a key concern. Organizations must integrate WLB strategies into job design and employment policies. Identifying WLB benefits is essential before implementing programs, enabling firms to appreciate their value and craft effective interventions. Role incompatibility-where work and family obligations conflict-forces individuals to prioritize one domain at the expense of the other, heightening stress. India has seen notable changes in women's participation in the workforce.

Recent surveys show that the female labour force participation rate (FLFPR) has significantly risen from around 23% in 2017-18 to about 41.7% in 2023-24, indicating increased inclusion of women in economic activities. This growth reflects structural shifts in the labour market, but also underscores persistent gender inequalities in job quality, pay, and security. Despite this increase, India's female participation remains below global peers, and experts

estimate it may take decades to match the average in other G20 countries. These macro trends are crucial because higher participation often means added pressures for women to manage dual responsibilities.

Work life balance : For working women, work-life balance is not simply about managing office hours and household work; it is about recognizing mental well-being, self-care, and personal growth as legitimate priorities. Scheduling priorities might mean setting boundaries at work, allocating time for rest without guilt, or consciously sharing domestic responsibilities. The term refers to the equilibrium between an individual's professional responsibilities and personal life. Work-life balance means tackling daily tasks effectively without sacrificing personal priorities- like health, family and friends, culture, and hobbies and vice versa. This doesn't require equal time for every aspect; instead individuals intentionally allocate their energy and hours based on personal values and goals. When women only respond to what is already on their schedule - office deadlines, household tasks, care giving, they risk burnout, stress, and emotional exhaustion.

Mental wellbeing : On the other hand mental well-being refers to a state in which individuals realize their abilities, can cope with normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their community. It refers to a positive state of psychological and emotional health; it indicates that a person is able to function cognitively and emotionally in a manner that is productive and fulfilling. Wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct (Seligman, 2012) that involves more than just being in a good mood or feeling happy. In addition to positive emotions, wellbeing is achieved through optimal development, a 'meaningful' life, and satisfaction of basic human needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000) It is a multidimensional capability of mind. Mental wellbeing is far more than just the absence of sadness or the presence of happiness; it is the comprehensive "capability of mind" that encompasses both how we feel and how we function. Mental wellbeing enable us to cope with stress, learn effectively work While we often conflate wellbeing with our immediate mood, the World Health Organization and Sapien Labs highlight that true mental health is the engine that allows us to navigate life's complexities-enabling us to cope with stress, learn effectively, work productively, and maintain healthy social connections. It allows an individual to not only function at a high level but also contribute meaningfully to their community.

2. Statement of the problem : Work-life balance (WLB) poses a critical challenge for Indian working women, intensified by patriarchal norms, role overload, and limited institutional support. Women's lives revolve around overlapping roles as professionals, mothers, caregivers, and wives. India's female labor force participation rate (FLFPR) has surged from 23% in 2017-18 to 41.07% in 2023-24, yet persistent gender inequalities exacerbate WLB struggles. Sociologically, WLB emerges from intersections of class, gender, occupation, and family dynamics, rooted in patriarchal undervaluation of domestic labor. This leads to role conflict, mental health issues, and burnout. Organizations must integrate WLB strategies into policies

to boost satisfaction, retention, and productivity. Sociologically, WLB emerges from the interplay of class, gender, occupation, and family dynamics, deeply rooted in patriarchal structures that undervalue domestic labor. Women are often expected to embody the "ideal worker" while fulfilling caregiver roles, leading to role overload and conflict. A healthy WLB is increasingly recognized as vital for mental wellbeing of women.

3. Significance of the study : Mental wellbeing is often treated as an individual struggle, but for women, but it is deeply tied to systematic discrimination, social norms, gender roles etc. Mental healthcare is the fundamental right (Mental healthcare Act 2017 and National Mental Health Policy 2014). But the fact is women faces unique challenges, bearing the double burden both paid employment and unpaid household responsibilities. According to 2019 UN Women report women perform three times more unpaid care work than men worldwide . The study of work-life balance and mental well-being among Indian women is important, because women in Indian society have multifaceted roles in professional and domestic spheres. In Indian society, women frequently bear the dual burden of paid employment and unpaid household duties that leading to heightened stress, anxiety, and burnout. Looking at this balance shows how hard it can be to balance work and family responsibilities as well as how it can affect mental health. Examining this balance is vital for enhances women's quality of life, productivity, and empowerment which is the key drivers of sustainable social and economic progress in India.

4. Objectives :

The main objective of this paper is

1. to explore the key factors effecting work life balance among Indian women.
2. to analyse the negative effect of imbalance work life on mental wellbeing

5. Methodology : This paper is based on secondary research methodology. The study synthesizes and critically analyzes findings drawn from existing academic articles, pivotal legal judgments, comprehensive policy reports, and established social science research.

Descriptive research design is used to analyse data systematically, collected from secondary sources.

5. Discussion and findings :

A shift from survival-based time management to value-based living for women, is crucial for achieving genuine work life balance and protecting mental well-being. When women are empowered to schedule their priorities, they move closer to a life that is balanced, dignified, and emotionally healthy. In India's fast-growing economy, women are participating in both paid jobs and home duties like never before. Yet, striking a true work-life balance, fulfilling professional responsibilities alongside personal ones without burnout-remains a significant concern. This affects not just productivity but also mental health. For Indian women, established gender roles, heavy household expectations, and scarce institutional support make it even harder. Work-life balance is also a socio structural issue shaped by class, gender, occupation

and family. For women, it often means bearing the full load of both "ideal worker" and "ideal caregiver" roles, leading to role overload, conflict and poor mental health. Sociological perspectives highlight that such gendered division of labour is rooted in patriarchal norms that undervalue women's unpaid domestic work.

Some of the Factors Affecting Women's Work-Life Balance among Indian women from sociological point of view :

5.1 Traditional Gender Norms : Patriarchy is the base of Indian society and possesses a norm inherent tendency to disempower and control women's everyday aspect of life. Societal norms frequently position women as primary caregivers and homemakers, even when employed. Patriarchal expectations assign women the "second shift"-paid work followed by domestic work. Such norms constrain women's autonomy over time and choices.

5.2 Family Structure and Support : The presence of young children or elderly dependents intensifies strain, especially in the absence of extended family networks or accessible childcare options.

5.3 Role Overload and Dual Burden : Working women routinely experience role overload from managing household chores alongside paid employment, with limited male partner involvement. This double burden leads to psychological conflict between occupational and family's demand.

5.4 Organisational Cultures : Rigid workplace structures, long working hours, lack of flexible schedules and limited remote work options further disadvantage women. Only a minority of organisations offer flexibility that could help balance roles.

5.5 Social pressure and Stereotypes : Women pursuing career advancement often face guilt or societal judgment for deviating from conventional family - oriented roles.

5.6 Economic Pressures : Low-quality jobs, wage gaps, and insecurity in employment increase stress, as women often lack of social and financial safeguards.

6. Impact on Mental Well-Being : An imbalanced work-life balance has profound and multifaceted consequences for individuals, organizations, and society at large. When professional obligations consistently outweigh personal time, individuals are exposed to sustained levels of stress that can significantly impair their psychological well-being. Chronic work-related pressure often results in **anxiety** and Depression, **irritability**, Sleep Disturbances, **emotional exhaustion**, and, in severe cases, **depression and burnout**. The absence of sufficient recovery time prevents individuals from effectively managing stress, thereby diminishing cognitive functioning, concentration, and decision-making abilities. Over time, this psychological strain not only reduces job satisfaction but also undermines overall life satisfaction.

In addition to mental health implications, an imbalanced work-life structure adversely affects physical health. Prolonged working hours and inadequate rest contribute to fatigue, sleep disturbances, and weakened immune function. Persistent stress can elevate the risk of

hypertension, cardiovascular diseases, and other stress-related illnesses. Moreover, individuals who prioritize work excessively may neglect essential health-promoting behaviors such as regular exercise, balanced nutrition, and routine medical care, further exacerbating health risks.

Work-life imbalance also has significant social consequences. Limited time and emotional availability can strain relationships with family members, friends, and colleagues. Reduced participation in social and recreational activities may lead to feelings of isolation and weakened social support systems. As interpersonal relationships deteriorate, individuals may experience diminished emotional resilience, which further intensifies stress and dissatisfaction.

At the same time, excessive dedication to work does not necessarily translate into enhanced productivity. Instead, sustained overwork can harm creativity, problem-solving capacity, and overall efficiency. Employees experiencing burnout are more likely to exhibit decreased engagement, increased absenteeism, and higher turnover intentions. Consequently, organizations may suffer from reduced performance outcomes and increased operational costs.

Work-life balance remains a central challenge for Indian women, shaped by gendered social norms, inadequate institutional support, and rising economic demands. It has become a burning issue in today's modern world. Numerous researches have been done regarding this issue. Working women struggle to reconcile professional and personal roles, contributing to stress and compromised mental well-being. Addressing this issue requires a multi-dimensional approach-from workplace reforms to mental health initiatives and societal changes that challenge gender stereotypes. Enhancing women's work-life balance is not only a gender equity goal but also pivotal for socio-economic development of the society and the well-being of its workforce. It is very necessary to acknowledge women by providing more appropriate work-life balance measures for them.

7. Conclusion : Different research reveals that women experienced depression at rates is much higher than men. In India mental health of working women is a critical issue due to the combined impact of gender norms, stigma, caregiving responsibilities,unequal power structure of patriarchal social system, and limited access to mental health care it is not only a biological factor. In today's fast pase world, this balance is crucial for job satisfaction, physical health and mental well-being of women. An imbalanced work-life extends beyond individual discomfort to create broader psychological, physical, social, and organizational challenges. Maintaining work-life balance is essential for protecting mental well-being of women to ensuring long-term productivity. Women with balanced lives are more resilient, creative, and emotionally stable. From an organizational perspective, women employees with good mental well-being show higher engagement, better performance, and lower absenteeism. Promoting a sustainable integration of professional and personal responsibilities is therefore essential for maintaining long-term well-being, fostering healthy relationships, and ensuring consistent productivity and

performance. It also strengthens relationships with employers by fostering mutual respect and productivity.

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Postcolonial Subaltern Identity and Voice of Tribal Women in Mahasweta Devi's "Douloti the Bountiful"

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Abstract

This paper explores postcolonial subaltern identity and the silencing of tribal women in Mahasweta Devi's short story "Douloti the Bountiful". It examines how Adivasi communities remain excluded from the postcolonial nation-state of India despite political independence. The paper argues that colonial structures of exploitation persist through bonded labour systems that continues the marginalization of tribal populations. Through the character of Douloti, the study shows how the tribal female body becomes a site of layered oppression, involving economic, social, and sexual exploitation. Her suffering and death expose the limits of national freedom and question dominant narratives of development. The paper highlights how Devi's narrative foregrounds the invisibility of tribal lives and calls for a rethinking of nationhood that includes subaltern voices, particularly those of tribal women.

Key words : postcolonialism, subaltern identity, tribal women, adivasi, bonded labour.

Introduction

Benedict Anderson famously said "a nation is an imagined political community" (4). But what happens when this imagination fails to include certain portions of the population? Or, what if that population refuses to be included at all? A major problem with the postcolonial Indian nation-state is its failure to gain the trust of all parts of the population that has resulted in frequent uprisings against the nation. This has happened because of the uneven forms of national development and the continued injustices against certain portions of the population. The condition of the poor, the downtrodden, the outcastes and the minorities has remained the same as was in the time of colonial rule, sometimes even worse than the later while the rest of India walks towards 'development' and 'modernity'. The binary oppositions like coloniser/colonised, oppressor/oppressed, master/slave continue to exist in postcolonial India, though in newer, subtler forms. Pramod Nayar calls this phenomenon 'postcolonial subalternization' "whereby the new elites exploit the nation's poor, and nationalism has become a key word in preserving the power and privileges of this class of native masters" (99). The place of these postcolonial subalterns, the 'shadow-citizens' in the national imagination needs to be questioned,

and the paper aims to deal with this concern.

Discussion/Analysis

The tribals or the adivasis are amongst the most neglected and exploited communities of India. Their life-conditions did not change with the independence of the country, nor are they ever recognised in the main-stream society. The nation for them, has proved to be just an oppressive mechanism which in the name of development snatched away from them their natural way of life. The large scale destruction of forests and denial of rights to their lands, deviated them from their earlier symbiotic relationship with the earth and left them as shadow beings of their former selves. Their culture is now at stake and their identity dwindling. At no point, they can imagine themselves at par the main-stream society, nor the society outside wants to understand them.

Mahasweta Devi is well-known as the crusader of tribal rights in India; her writings are the weapons to assert tribal identity. Her *Imaginary Maps* (1993) is a collection of three translated stories: "The Hunt", "Douloti the Bountiful" and "Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha". Each of these stories reiterates the exploitation of the tribals on the hands of main-stream upper class society. That there is no meeting point between the two is echoed throughout the collection. The title itself talks about the futility of mere geographical recognition on the face of the internal colonization meted out on the tribals. The translator, Gayatri Spivak writes in the appendix to the collection that in the stories "Devi stages the workings of the postcolonial state with minute knowledge, anger and loving despair"(208).

This paper seeks to discuss the place and identity of the tribals in the postcolonial nation state in relation to their environmental rights. The tribals are the most original and ancient inhabitants of India. They were mostly hunters and peasants, living mainly near forests and hills. They used to have a close relationship with nature and acquired their livelihood from the forest. But during the British rule, their relationship with the forest and the land was shattered. The British introduced the zamindari/ landownership system and levied taxes that were beyond the paying capacity of the tribal cultivators. Gradually their land and their forests were snatched away from them. Many outsiders also started living in the tribal areas. They offered credit to the tribals but in turn turned them into bonded labourers. The bonded labour system subjected them to lifelong exploitations and broke the back bone of the whole tribal society. The Britishers left, but the bonded labour system and the exploitation continued.

Imaginary Maps brings out the horrid picture of bond slavery and tribal exploitations. Especially the story "Douloti the Bountiful" gives us a vivid picture of abuses on tribal man and woman. The story of Ganori Nagesia becoming Crook Nagesia is a testimony of atrocities on tribal bondslaves. Ganori Nagesia was the Kamiya (bond slave) of Munabar Singh Chandela. Ganori used to do all sorts of work for Munabar Singh. When one day Ganori's carelessness put Munabar's plough steer into a tiger's mouth, Ganori was made to plough the field by putting the axle on his own shoulders. Soon he fell down with the axle on his back and

became crooked for the rest of his life. The Kamiyas do not have the right to live like a human being. The master do not allow them to acquire any standards of living: "First, a Nagesia shouldn't have money. If he does, he shouldn't raise a roof. If you raise a roof, or buy a water-buffalo, the master will notice. If you buy land, the master will grab it. If you buy cattle, the master will snatch them. If you buy an umbrella for your head, or shoes for your feet, he'll have you tied to the post in the yard and beaten" (23). The debt of the Kamiyas never ends and they can never be free in their lifetime.

Crook Nagesia's debt of three hundred rupees ends when Paramananda, a person from the town pays it to Munabar in lieu of taking away his daughter, Douloti for marriage. But instead of marrying her, Paramananda put her in the profession of prostitution. She becomes a 'kamiya-whore', a bond-slave who has to repay her debt by selling her body every day. Like other bond slaves, their debts also never ends, rather it increases manifold and they die destitute when their body can no longer satisfy the customers. Freedom is a word unknown to Douloti and her kind. They don't even recognise themselves as citizens of free India. When Ganori Nagesia was asked when his daughter was born, his reply was: "when there was independence for you and the bosses" (44). Truly, the end of colonial rule brought freedom to the rich and the upper classes, the poor still remains the slave.

The life and death of Douloti mocks at India's independence. Constant abuse on her body soon leads her towards death. She fails to complete her final journey towards home, and lies dead over a map drawn on the premises of a school on 15th of August, India's Independence Day. "Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies bonded labour spreadeagled, kamiya- whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse... Today on the fifteenth of August, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag... Douloti is all over India" (94). In these lines the writer has symbolically shown the futility of celebrating India's Independence when a large portion of its citizens has never tasted any freedom. Douloti's symbolic death questions the place of the tribals in the national and cultural map of India.

Conclusion

Devi said in an interview, "You see, India is not an independent country. What happened four thousand years ago, is happening still now... it is happening even now". End of colonialism did not bring any recognition to the lives of the tribals in India. Through her stories, Devi stresses on the urgent need of including the tribals into the map of India because they are "the foundation and ground of the civilization of India" (Devi 197). She specially voices against the oppression of tribal women, and her stories asserts their rights against mainstream patriarchal society.

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The Body as a Universe: Feminist Self-Realization in Vandana Singh's *The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet*

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Abstract

Vandana Singh's short story collection, The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet (2008), delves into human relationships and mental complexities through the lens of speculative fiction. Singh skillfully combines elements of science fiction with feminist themes, bringing attention to the challenges faced by women in Indian society. This collection consists of ten stories, with the titular piece standing out for its exploration of the isolation and introspective journeys of female characters. As a whole, it represents a significant contribution to speculative fiction. Singh posits that traditional realism may not fully capture the complexities of human experience.

Key words : *Existential Exploration, Feminist Perspective, Isolation, Intimate Bonds, Self-Realization*

Introduction

This paper analyses "The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet", focusing on the central character, Kamala, who feels isolated from her husband after years of neglect. Her journey into an imaginary realm, where she envisions herself as a planet, exemplifies her inner transformation and rebellion against her controlling and dismissive husband, Ramnath. Through Kamala, Singh explores themes of alienation and self-discovery, connecting these experiences to the societal expectations that often marginalize women. This paper examines Singh's portrayal of women's experiences in a patriarchal context, contextualising Kamala's transformation as an embodiment of feminist consciousness. It primarily addresses how Kamala, the protagonist, achieves freedom from the constraints of patriarchal dominance. Her transformation thus represents a manifestation of feminist consciousness as she explores her inner world to attain liberation.

Kamala and Ramnath : Marital Alienation and Neglect

Kamala and Ramnath Mishra have been married for decades, but their relationship lacks true emotional connection. Ramnath, a retired bureaucrat, shows indifference towards Kamala's feelings and perspectives, viewing her primarily as a functional presence rather than an equal partner. As a result, Kamala feels emotionally isolated, with her needs and desires

consistently overlooked. Although she diligently fulfills her duties as a wife and mother, she does so without receiving reciprocal affection or acknowledgment from her husband, especially as they enter retirement and find themselves living alone.

Kamala's Psychological Transformation

Kamala's transformation begins subtly, characterized by moments of introspection and an increasing awareness of her inner void. The culmination of her journey occurs when she envisions herself as a planet, shedding her human identity and detaching from traditional societal expectations. In an act that shocks Ramnath, Kamala unwinds her sari, symbolizing her rejection of her human role and, by extension, her societal and marital roles. She asserts, "A planet does not need clothes," which powerfully conveys her newfound sense of freedom from social conventions.

Through this declaration, Kamala embodies a cosmic identity that transcends her limited role as a wife. This transformation disrupts Ramnath's expectations and triggers a crisis within him. He is horrified by Kamala's behavior, particularly her declarations and actions, which challenge his control and the traditional power dynamics of their marriage. Ramnath becomes consumed by thoughts of his family's reputation, fearing that Kamala's actions will tarnish his honour.

The Role of Isolation and Societal Judgment

Ramnath's discomfort with Kamala's transformation is rooted not only in her behavior but also in the fear of social judgment. Dr. Kumar, a family physician, dismisses Kamala's transformation as a manifestation of unfulfilled desires rather than an illness, suggesting that women often act unexpectedly when their needs are unmet. However, Ramnath fails to recognize this deeper issue and instead contemplates confining her to a mental asylum, reflecting the tendency in patriarchal societies to pathologize women's expressions of autonomy.

Imagined Cosmic Liberation

Kamala's journey reaches its zenith when she imagines herself ascending into the cosmos. In a climactic scene, she releases balloons into the air, representing her liberation from earthly constraints and signalling her final departure from the expectations that had confined her. As she envisions herself as a planet, floating freely, she sheds the last remnants of her human identity and the societal roles that have imprisoned her. Kamala's transformation and subsequent departure convey her ultimate rejection of patriarchy. Her symbolic ascent into the cosmos represents the realization of her feminist consciousness, as she embraces an identity beyond the traditional roles of wife and mother. In contrast, Ramnath's reaction to her ascent is one of regret and anguish as he finally recognizes the depth of her emotional sacrifice, but only after she has left his life forever.

Methodology

This analysis combines feminist and existential lenses to examine how Kamala's psychological journey reflects broader issues of female alienation and empowerment. Using

Singh's narrative as a case study, this paper interprets Kamala's transformation as a critique of traditional gender roles. A textual analysis of Kamala and Ramnath's interactions will reveal how Singh challenges oppressive marital norms and invites readers to question the societal expectations placed on women.

Discussion

The Alienation of Kamala: A Portrait of Marginalization

Kamala's experiences reflect a common theme in Singh's work: the isolation of women within conventional familial roles. Ramnath, a former bureaucrat absorbed in his career, neglects Kamala's emotional needs, resulting in an emotionally barren marriage. Singh's portrayal of Kamala's estrangement symbolizes the invisibility many women face when reduced to mere roles within a family. For forty years, Kamala embodies the role of the dutiful wife, orbiting her husband like a planet around a sun, only to be met with dismissal and moral hypocrisy.

Kamala's Self-Realization as a Planet

Kamala's self-assertion as a planet serves as a powerful metaphor for reclaiming her identity beyond societal roles. When she begins undressing, stating that "A planet does not need clothes," she defies expectations and expresses her newfound freedom. Her imagined journey as a planet reflects her assertion of independence, breaking free from the constraints that have defined her existence. This transformation acts as a rebellion against a life centered around her husband's needs, symbolizing her refusal to remain a satellite in his orbit.

Ramnath's Response : Gender Expectations and Societal Pressures

Ramnath's reaction to Kamala's transformation reveals much about his character; he perceives her behaviour as madness instead of recognizing her quest for self-identity. More concerned about societal judgment than his wife's well-being, he attempts to control her using traditional methods, including contacting a doctor and restricting her movements. Singh highlights Ramnath's failure to understand Kamala's internal struggles, reinforcing the disconnect between them.

The Final Confrontation and Kamala's Cosmic Departure

In a symbolic climax, Kamala "ascends" as she releases balloons, signifying her final detachment from a world that has failed to understand her. Ramnath, unable to comprehend this act, remains tethered to his pride and shame, symbolically anchored to the ground. Kamala's departure serves as a powerful statement about women's need for liberation from patriarchal oppression. Singh crafts an ambiguous ending where Kamala's disappearance into the cosmos speaks to a broader desire for autonomy that transcends social and marital confines.

Conclusion

Singh's "The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet" uses science fiction to explore themes of self-realization, autonomy, and feminist consciousness. Kamala's journey as a planet serves as a profound metaphor for independence, illustrating the silent suffering of many

women in restrictive marriages. Through her transformation, Singh critiques the societal expectations that bind women and invites readers to embrace new possibilities for identity and self-worth. This story emphasizes that communication and mutual respect are essential for healthy partnerships and underscores the importance of women reclaiming their strength and seeking fulfillment beyond predefined roles.

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দেওলাংখুই উপন্যাসত নাৰী চৰিত্ৰৰ বহুমাত্ৰিক ৰূপ : এক আলোচনা

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সংক্ষিপ্ত সাৰ :

নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ চিত্ৰণ আৰু বিশ্লেষণ সাহিত্যৰ এটি গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ দিশ। সাহিত্যৰ মাজেৰে এক বিশেষ অঞ্চলৰ সমাজ-জীৱনৰ প্ৰতিচ্ছবি প্ৰতিফলন ঘটে। অৱশ্যে সমাজভেদে নাৰীৰ স্থানৰো তাৰতম্য লক্ষ্য কৰা যায়। মাতৃস্থানীয় সমাজৰ বিপৰীতে পিতৃস্থানীয় সমাজত দেশ-কাল ভেদে নাৰীৰ স্থান আৰু মানৰ পৰিৱৰ্তন হোৱা দেখা যায়। এইক্ষেত্ৰত একোগৰাকী সাহিত্যিকে সাহিত্যৰ মাজত নাৰীক বিভিন্ন সময়ত কাহিনীৰ প্ৰয়োজনত নিজা ধৰণে সৃষ্টি কৰি লয়।

একবিংশ শতিকাৰ অসমীয়া সাহিত্যক নেতৃত্ব প্ৰদান কৰি অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ বিভিন্ন দিশক আগবঢ়াই লৈ যোৱাত নিজৰ প্ৰচেষ্টা অব্যাহত ৰখা ঔপন্যাসিক, সমালোচক, গল্পকাৰ, প্ৰবন্ধকাৰ ৰীতা চৌধুৰী সাম্প্ৰতিক কালৰ এগৰাকী লেখিকা। ‘অবিৰত যাত্ৰা’ (১৯৮১) উপন্যাসেৰে ঔপন্যাসিক জীৱনৰ পাতনি মেলা চৌধুৰীৰ ২০০৫ চনত প্ৰকাশিত ‘দেওলাংখুই’ উপন্যাসখনে একেধাৰে ২০০৮ চনত সাহিত্য অকাডেমি বঁটা আৰু ২০০৬ চনত কলাগুৰু বিষ্ণুপ্ৰসাদ ৰাভা বঁটা লাভ কৰে। মধ্যযুগৰ পটভূমি গ্ৰহণ কৰা উপন্যাসখনত বুৰঞ্জীৰ সমল যথেষ্ট লুকাই আছে যদিও ঔপন্যাসিকাই পাতনিতেই পাঠকক উপন্যাসখন বুৰঞ্জী বুলি গ্ৰহণ কৰিবলৈ নিষেধ কৰিছে। উপন্যাসখনত অসমৰ কমতাপুৰ অঞ্চলৰ লগতে তিৱা বা লালুং সমাজত নাৰীৰ স্থান সম্বন্ধে জনা যায়। গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত উপন্যাসখনত উল্লিখিত নাৰী চৰিত্ৰৰ চিত্ৰণ সম্পৰ্কে বিশ্লেষণাত্মক ভাবে অধ্যয়ন কৰাৰ প্ৰয়াস কৰা হ’ল।

বীজ শব্দ : ঔপন্যাসিক, সমাজ-জীৱন, নাৰী, পুৰুষতাত্ত্বিক, লালুং, চৰিত্ৰ ইত্যাদি।

০.১ প্ৰস্তাৱনা :

সাহিত্য হ’ল কোনো এটা জাতিৰ খচৰা স্বৰূপ। প্ৰতিখন সাহিত্যই পৃথিৱীৰ সকলোবোৰ ভাষাৰ আধুনিক বিকাশত ভূমিকা লয়। অসমীয়া সাহিত্যৰ সাম্প্ৰতিক সময়ক প্ৰতিনিধিত্ব কৰা এগৰাকী সাহিত্যিক ৰীতা চৌধুৰী একেধাৰে চুটিগল্পকাৰ, কবি, ঔপন্যাসিক, সমালোচক, প্ৰবন্ধকাৰ হিচাপে বৰ্তমান সময়ত পৰিচিত চৌধুৰীৰ সাহিত্য ৰচনাৰ কৌশল সম্পূৰ্ণ নিজস্ব।

‘অবিৰত যাত্ৰা’ (১৯৮১) উপন্যাসেৰে ঔপন্যাসিক জীৱনৰ পাতনি মেলা চৌধুৰীয়ে একাদিক্ৰমে তীৰ্থভূমি (১৯৮৮), মহা জীৱনৰ আধাৰশিলা (১৯৯৩), নয়না, তৰালী, সুজাতা (১৯৯৬), পপীয়া তৰাৰ সাধু (১৯৯৮), ৰাগ মালকোশ (১৯৯৯), জল পদ্ম (১৯৯৯), হৃদয় নিৰুপায় (২০০৩), দেওলাংখুই (২০০৫),

এই সময় সেই সময়, ৰাজীৱ ঈশ্বৰ, জাহ্নৱী, বিভাস্ত বাস্তৱ, মৰে অসম জীয়ে কোন (২০২১) আদি উপন্যাস ৰচনা কৰে।

ৰীতা চৌধুৰীৰ দেওলাংখুই উপন্যাসখনে ২০০৮ চনত সাহিত্য অঁকাডেমি বঁটা লাভ কৰে। উপন্যাসখনত তিৰা জনগোষ্ঠীৰ সমাজ-সংস্কৃতিৰ বিভিন্ন দিশৰ প্ৰকাশ হৈছে। বিশেষকৈ উপন্যাসখনত ঔপন্যাসিকাই নাৰী চৰিত্ৰৰ সবল আৰু দুৰ্বল দুয়োটা ৰূপেই প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে।

উপন্যাস এবিধ কলা বাবে ইয়াত বাস্তৱৰ ছবি ঔপন্যাসিকে নিজস্ব ধৰণে উপস্থাপন কৰে। উপন্যাসখনত মধ্যযুগৰ পটভূমি গ্ৰহণ কৰিলেও ঔপন্যাসিকাই “দেওলাংখুই”ৰ পাতনিত ইয়াক বুৰঞ্জী বুলি নধৰিবলৈ অনুৰোধ জনাইছে (পাতনি, দেওলাংখুই)। ইতিহাসৰ ফাঁকে ফাঁকে ঔপন্যাসিকাই নৰ-নাৰীৰ জীৱন ধাৰণৰ প্ৰণালী আৰু সমসাময়িক সময়ত সমাজত নাৰীৰ স্থান সম্পৰ্কে উপন্যাসখনত উপস্থাপন কৰিছে। বিশেষকৈ ৰীতা চৌধুৰীৰ দুটাকৈ বঁটা প্ৰাপ্ত এই উপন্যাসখনত কেনেদৰে নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ চিত্ৰণ কৰিছে, সেই সম্পৰ্কে গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত বিশ্লেষণ কৰা হ’ব।

০.১.১ গৱেষণাৰ গুৰুত্ব আৰু উদ্দেশ্য :

মধ্যযুগৰ পটভূমিত ৰচনা কৰা উপন্যাস ‘দেওলাংখুই’ত ঔপন্যাসিকাই প্ৰতাপসিংহ, আৰিমত্ত, ৰত্নসিংহ, জোঙালবলহ আদি পুৰুষ চৰিত্ৰৰ চিত্ৰণ যথাসম্ভৱ তুলি ধৰিছে, একেদৰে চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা ওৰফে কনচাৰী, গংগাৱতী, লখাইতৰা, সুকোমলা আদি নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ চিত্ৰণতো জনগোষ্ঠীয় সমাজখন প্ৰতিফলন কৰিছে। গৱেষণা পত্ৰখন প্ৰস্তুত কৰাৰ উদ্দেশ্য হৈছে উপন্যাসৰ নাৰী চৰিত্ৰসমূহক বিশ্লেষণ কৰা। যিহেতু এখন সমাজৰ বিশ্লেষণ কৰিব লাগিলে নাৰী চৰিত্ৰৰ চিত্ৰণ গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ বিষয়, সেয়েহে গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত যথাসম্ভৱ ঔপন্যাসিকাই চিত্ৰণ কৰা নাৰী চৰিত্ৰসমূহৰ বিশ্লেষণ কৰিবলৈ প্ৰয়াস কৰা হ’ল।

০.১.২ গৱেষণাৰ পৰিসৰ :

গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনত যিহেতু উপন্যাসখনৰ বিষয়বস্তুৰ আলোচনা সম্ভৱ নহয়, সেয়েহে উপন্যাসখনৰ নাৰী চৰিত্ৰসমূহৰ সীমিত পৰিসৰত আলোচনা কৰা হ’ল।

০.১.৩ অধ্যয়নৰ পদ্ধতি :

গৱেষণা পত্ৰখনি অধ্যয়নৰ ক্ষেত্ৰত ঘাইকৈ বিশ্লেষণাত্মক পদ্ধতিৰ সহায় লোৱা হ’ল। মুখ্য উৎস হিচাপে ৰীতা চৌধুৰীৰ ‘দেওলাংখুই’ উপন্যাস আৰু গৌণ উৎস হিচাপে বিভিন্ন গ্ৰন্থ, আলোচনী আৰু Internet ৰ পৰাও সমল লোৱা হ’ল।

২.০ দেওলাংখুইৰ কাহিনীৰ চমু আলোকপাত :

দেওলাংখুই অৰ্থাৎ ‘দেওলগা তৰোৱাল’। ঔপন্যাসিকাই মধ্যযুগৰ পটভূমিত বীৰপুৰুষ জোঙাল বলহৰ জীৱন চৰিত উপন্যাসখনত প্ৰকাশ কৰিছে। কমতাপুৰৰ ৰজা প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰৰ লগত আৰম্ভ হৈ গোভা, খলা আদি বিভিন্ন ৰাজ্য আৰু বিভিন্ন চৰিত্ৰৰ বৰ্ণনাৰে উপন্যাসখনৰ কাহিনী বৰ্ণিত। উপন্যাসখনৰ সমগ্ৰ চৰিত্ৰ ইটোৰ লগত সিটো সাঙুৰ খাই আছে। উপন্যাসখনত ঔপন্যাসিকাই যেনেদৰে প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰৰ অহংকাৰ চিত্ৰণ কৰিছে, একেদৰে সাধুকুমাৰৰ চৰিত্ৰত অনাৰ্যৰ সবলতা, উদাৰতাৰ প্ৰতিফলন ঘটাইছে। উপন্যাসখনৰ প্ৰতিটো চৰিত্ৰই অপূৰ্ণতাৰ মাজত নিজৰ জীৱন পাৰ কৰিছে। প্ৰতিটো চৰিত্ৰৰ মাজত জীৱনৰ সঁচা উপলব্ধি আৰু সত্য স্বীকাৰৰ প্ৰৱণতা প্ৰকাশ পাইছে।

উপন্যাসখনৰ কাহিনী আৰম্ভ হৈছে প্ৰতাপসিংহৰ ৰাজদৰবাৰত। আৰ্যৰ ৰজা প্ৰতাপসিংহই নিজৰ পত্নী তথা ৰাণী চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক হিয়া উজাৰি ভাল পায়। কিন্তু বিধিৰ বিপাকত পৰি গৰ্ভৱতী চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক গোভা ৰজা সাধুকুমাৰৰ লগত নিৰ্বাসন দিয়ে। পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত গোভাৰ ৰাজ্যত সাধুকুমাৰে চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক পত্নীৰ মৰ্যদা প্ৰদান কৰি ৰাজ্য পৰিচালনাত মনোনিবেশ কৰে যদিও কোনোদিনেই স্বামীৰ অধিকাৰ চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাৰ পৰা বিচৰা নাই। যাৰবাবে চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাই পূৰ্বৰ প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰৰ পৰা পোৱা পৰিচয় লুপ্ত কৰি সম্পূৰ্ণৰূপে তিৱা সমাজত গোভাৰ ৰাণী আৰু কনচাৰী হিচাপে নিজৰ পৰিচয় গ্ৰহণ কৰে। পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত কনচাৰীৰ পুত্ৰ আৰিমন্ত আৰু খলাৰ ৰাণী গংগাৱতীৰ প্ৰেমৰ সম্পৰ্কৰ কাহিনী, ৰত্নাৱলীৰ লগত বিবাহ, ৰত্নসিংহ আৰু লখাইতৰাৰ জন্ম, আৰিমন্ত আৰু প্ৰতাপসিংহৰ যুদ্ধ, গংগাৱতীৰ ফালৰ পুত্ৰ জোঙাল বলহৰ হাতত আৰিমন্তৰ মৃত্যু আৰু শেষত জোঙাল বলহৰ কছাৰী ৰজাৰ হাতত মৃত্যুৰে উপন্যাসৰ কাহিনী সামৰা হৈছে।

৩.০ উপন্যাসৰ নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ :

উপন্যাসখনৰ নাৰী চৰিত্ৰসমূহৰ ভিতৰত - চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা ওৰফে কনচাৰী, গংগাৱতী, ৰত্নাৱলী, লখাইতৰা, সুকোমলা, সোণজিৰা, প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰৰ মাক যজ্ঞৱতী আদি। প্ৰতিটো চৰিত্ৰ ব্যতিক্ৰমী চৰিত্ৰ হিচাপে উপন্যাসিকাই অংকন কৰিছে। কোনোবাটো নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ পতিপ্ৰণা আৰু কোনোবাটো বিশ্বাসঘাটক। আকৌ কোনোবাটো সমাজৰ প্ৰতি দায়িত্বশীল আৰু কোনোবাটো লেঞ্চকা, মমতাময়ী। উপন্যাসিকাই চৰিত্ৰসমূহ বুৰঞ্জীৰ আধাৰত অংকন কৰিছে, যদিও তাৰ লগত কল্পনাৰ সংযোগ ঘটাই উজ্জ্বল ৰূপে তুলি ধৰিছে। তলত উপন্যাসখনৰ নাৰী চৰিত্ৰসমূহ বিশ্লেষণ কৰা হ'ল।

৩.১ চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা :

কমতাপুৰৰ ৰজা প্ৰতাপসিংহৰ মহিষী চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা। চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাৰ ৰূপ আৰু যৌৱনে প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰক বিবশ কৰিছিল। যাৰবাবে যেতিয়া চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক “সোণৰ ৰূপৰ বনকৰা পাট কাপোৰ, মণি-মাণিক খটোৱা স্বৰ্ণলংকাৰ” (পৃ. ০৯) ত দেখা পাইছিল তেতিয়া ৰজাই ৰাজ্যৰ কাম পাহৰি গৈছিল। একেদৰে চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাও পতিব্ৰতা নাৰীৰূপে “স্বামীক পৰম গুৰুৰূপে পূজা কৰাৰ প্ৰশিক্ষণেৰে প্ৰশিক্ষিত চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাই প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰৰ চৰণ স্পৰ্শ নকৰাকৈ ৰাতিপুৱা মাটিত ভৰি নথৈছিল” (পৃ. ০৯)। চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা চৰিত্ৰটো যেনে ৰূপৰ আকৰ আছিল, একেদৰে গুণৰ ক্ষেত্ৰতো মহিয়ান আছিল। চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাৰ শাছৰেকে সদায় চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক সোঁৱৰাই দিছিল যে- “আমি গৃহবদ্ধ নাৰী” (পৃ. ৩৯)। অৰ্থাৎ ৰজাৰ সৰ্বোত্তম প্ৰিয় নাৰী হ'লেও বিভিন্ন বাধা-নিষেধৰ মাজত চলিব লাগিব। আকৌ এঠাইত চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক উদ্দেশ্য কৰি শাছৰেকে নাৰীৰ নিয়মৰ বিষয়ে সোঁৱৰাই দিছে এনেদৰে- “তোমাৰ আই যে ভাল বংশৰ ছোৱালী। ছোৱালী জনম কেনে বাঞ্ছনৰ তেওঁ জানে কাৰণেই খং কৰিছিল। আমি উচ্চ কুলৰ, ৰজাঘৰৰ মানুহ। আমি নিজৰ মৰ্যাদা ৰক্ষা কৰিবই লাগিব। প্ৰয়োজন হ'লে নিজৰ ইচ্ছা-আকাংক্ষাও বিসৰ্জন দিব লাগিব।” (পৃ. ৪১)

সঁচাকৈ চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাই নজনাকৈয়ে নিজৰ সকলো ত্যাগ কৰিবলৈ সাজু হৈছিল। চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাৰ প্ৰেমত মগ্ন, সুখী, পৰিতৃপ্ত স্বামী প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰই সামান্য এটা ঘটনাৰ বাবে চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক নিৰ্বাসন দিছিল। চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা নিৰ্বিকাৰ হৈ গুচি গৈছিল গোভাৰজা সাধুকুমাৰৰ লগত আৰু পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত পাট-মুগাৰ ৰিহা-মেখেলা পৰিহিতা চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা তিৱা সাজ কাছাং ফাচকাই পিন্ধি নিজক সম্পূৰ্ণৰূপে সলনি কৰি এগৰাকী দৃঢ়, সাহসী নাৰীত পৰিণত হৈছিল।

৩.২ আবি কনচাৰী :

দেওলাংখুই উপন্যাসৰ এটি সৰল নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ হ'ল আবি কনচাৰী। প্ৰকৃততে ঔপন্যাসিকাই অতি নম্ৰ, সৰল, পতিপ্ৰাণা, লেহুকা, কোমল, আলসুৱা নাৰী চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাৰ আন এটি পৰিৱৰ্তিত ৰূপ হিচাপে আবি কনচাৰীক অংকন কৰিছে। চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাৰ দৰে কনচাৰী গৃহবন্দী নাৰী নহয়। কাৰণ গোভা ৰজাৰ ৰাণী নহ'লেও ৰাণীৰ মৰ্যাদাৰে মহিয়ান কনচাৰী “ৰাজকাৰ্যত সক্ৰিয়ভাৱে জড়িত হৈ থকা নেতৃস্থানীয় নাৰী। লালুং সমাজত কোনো নাৰীক পুৰুষে গৃহবদ্ধ কৰি নাৰাখে। পৰিৱৰ্তন হোৱা চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভাক - “গোভা, ডিমৰুৱা, নেলী, ভূঞা আৰু অন্যান্য অনুগত আৰু চুবুৰীয়া ৰাজ্যৰ প্ৰায় সকলো মানুহে আবি কনচাৰীক চিনি পায়। চিনি পায় এক জীৱন্ত কিস্মদন্তীৰ নায়িকা হিচাপে। সমাজৰ হিতাৰ্থে নিজক উচৰ্গা কৰা দয়াশীল আৰু জ্ঞানী নাৰী হিচাপে” (পৃ. ০৩)।

৩.৩ গংগাৱতী :

গংগাৱতী খলা ৰাজ্যৰ ৰাণী। ৰাণী গংগাৱতী অতি সৰু ৰাজ্য খলাৰ ৰাণী হ'লেও ওচৰ চুবুৰীয়া সকলো ৰাজ্যৰ লগত নিজৰ ব্যক্তিত্ব আৰু ৰাজনৈতিক কুশলতাৰে সন্দ্ভাৱেৰে চলিব জনা ৰাণী আছিল। গংগাৱতীয়ে কনচাৰীৰ পুত্ৰ আৰু গোভাৰ নৱনিৰ্বাচিত ৰজা আৰিমন্তৰ প্ৰশংসা তেওঁক দেখাৰ আগতে শুনিছে। ৰাজদৰবাৰত হোৱা ৰাজনৈতিক সভাত গংগাৱতী আৰু আৰিমন্তৰ দেখা-দেখি হয়। তাৰ পিছৰ পৰাই আৰিমন্ত আৰু গংগাৱতীৰ মাজত প্ৰেমৰ সম্পৰ্ক গঢ় লৈ উঠে। পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত আৰিমন্ত আৰু গংগাৱতীয়ে গম পাইছিল যে গংগাৱতীৰ কুল আৰু গোভা ৰজা সাধুকুমাৰৰ কুল একে। অৰ্থাৎ লালুং সমাজত একে কুলৰ মাজত বিবাহ নিষিদ্ধ। সমাজত থাকিলে সমাজৰ বাধা মানিবই লাগিব বুলি ভাবি দুয়োজনে নিজৰ প্ৰেমক গোপনে স্বীকৃতি দিছিল। আৰিমন্তৰ অন্তৰত বাজি উঠিছিল- “সমাজৰ নিয়ম আৰু হৃদয়ৰ দাবী এই দুটাৰ ভিতৰত কোনটো বাচি ল'ব আৰিমন্তই” (পৃ. ১৮৫)। অৱশেষত এটা চৰ্ত দিলে গংগাৱতীয়ে সমাজ এৰি আৰিমন্তৰ লগত চিৰদিনৰ বাবে গুচি যাব পাৰিব নে। এই প্ৰশ্নৰ উত্তৰ গংগাৱতীয়ে আৰিমন্তক চিঠিৰ জৰিয়তে এনেদৰে দিছিল- “বহুত ভাবি চালো মৃগাংক, ৰাজ্য আৰু সমাজ এৰি তোমাৰ লগত গুচি যোৱাটো মোৰ বাবে সম্ভৱ নহয়” (পৃ. ১৯৬)। পৰৱৰ্তী সময়ত গংগাৱতী আৰিমন্তৰ পুত্ৰৰ মাতৃ হয়, যদিও কেতিয়াও আৰিমন্তৰ লগত সংযোগ স্থাপন কৰিবলৈ চেষ্টা নকৰিলে। কেৱল কিবা অসুবিধা হ'লে কনচাৰীৰ পৰা সহায় বিচাৰিব বুলি উল্লেখ কৰিছে। গংগাৱতী চৰিত্ৰটো প্ৰেমৰ মহিমাৰে মহিয়ান হোৱাৰ লগতে ৰাণী হিচাপে সমাজৰ প্ৰতি থকা দায়বদ্ধতা আৰু ৰাজনৈতিক দক্ষতাৰে সমৃদ্ধ এটি উজ্জ্বল চৰিত্ৰ। যদিও চৰিত্ৰটো উপন্যাসত ফ্লেট চৰিত্ৰ হিচাপেহে পৰিগণিত হৈছে।

৩.৪ সোণজিৰা :

সোণজিৰা চৰিত্ৰটি এটি দায়িত্বশীল লালুং নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ। সোণজিৰা কনচাৰী গোভাৰ ৰাজানত অহাৰ সময়ৰ পৰাই উজ্জ্বল ৰূপত আৰু দায়িত্বশীল ভাবে কনচাৰীৰ সহচৰ হৈ আছিল। সোণজিৰাৰ মমতাপূৰ্ণ হৃদয়ে আৰিমন্ত আৰু জকাংকক প্ৰতিপালন কৰি ডাঙৰ-দীঘল কৰিছিল। সোণজিৰাৰ প্ৰশংসা এনেদৰে কৰিছে ঔপন্যাসিকাই- “লালুংসকলৰ তেজত বোধকৰো বিশ্বাসঘাটকতাৰ বীজেই নাই। কিন্তু সোণজিৰাৰ আনুগত্যৰ যেন তুলনা নাই” (পৃ. ২১)। লালুং সমাজৰ সকলো নিয়ম কনচাৰীক সোণজিৰাই শিকাইছিল আৰু নিজৰ বায়েকৰ মৰ্যাদা দিছিল। সোণজিৰা চৰিত্ৰটো উপন্যাসত প্ৰায় আৰম্ভণিৰ পৰা শেষলৈ বিদ্যমান। যিটো নাৰী

চৰিত্ৰই কনচাৰীৰ প্ৰতিটো ঘাট-প্ৰতিঘাটৰ কথা হৃদয়ংগম কৰি কনচাৰীৰ সহচৰ হৈ নিজৰ অস্তিত্ব বজাই ৰাখিছে।

৩.৫ ৰত্নাৱলী :

ঘোঁৰাচোৱা বিষয়া নীলকান্তৰ ছোৱালী হ'ল ৰত্নাৱলী। চতুৰ পিতৃ নীলকান্তই সুবিধা বুজি আৰিমন্তৰ লগত বন্ধুত্ব কৰি ৰত্নাৱলীক আৰিমন্তলৈ বিয়া দিয়ে। কিন্তু দেউতাকৰ বাবে বিয়া হোৱা ৰত্নাৱলীয়ে ফিংগুৱা কোঁৱৰক নিজৰ হৃদয় দান কৰিছিল। কিন্তু এই বিশ্বাসঘাটকতাৰ প্ৰতিদান ফিংগুৱা কোঁৱৰে ৰত্নাৱলীক এনেদৰে দিছিল- “যি নাৰীয়ে নিজৰ স্বামীক বিশ্বাসঘাটকতা কৰিব পাৰে সেই নাৰীক বিশ্বাস কৰি লগত লৈ যাম ? মই ইমান মুৰ্খ নহয় ৰত্নাৱলী” (পৃ. ২৭০)। ফিংগুৱাৰ তৰোৱালে ৰত্নাৱলীৰ বুকু পিঠি শালি ধৰি মৃত্যু মুখত পৰে, ইয়াতেই চৰিত্ৰটোৱে উপন্যাসত নিজৰ অস্তিত্ব হেৰুৱাই পেলায়।

৪.০ উপসংহাৰ :

ঔপন্যাসিকা ৰীতা চৌধুৰীৰ বিস্তৃত সাহিত্যৰ দৰে উপন্যাসৰ নাৰী চৰিত্ৰসমূহো বিচিত্ৰ। দেওলাংখুই উপন্যাসত মধ্যযুগৰ পটভূমিত বুৰঞ্জীৰ চৰিত্ৰসমূহক কল্পনাৰ দ্বাৰা অংকন কৰিছে। নাৰী প্ৰসংগত ঔপন্যাসিকাই পুৰুষ শাসিত সমাজ ব্যৱস্থাত নাৰীৰ অৱস্থান, প্ৰেমৰ জ্যোতিত দীপ্তিময়ী নাৰী, মমতাপূৰ্ণ হৃদয়ৰ নাৰী, বিশ্বাসঘাটক নাৰী আদি নাৰীৰ বিচিত্ৰ আৰু বিভিন্ন ৰূপৰ অংকন কৰিছে।

উপন্যাসখনৰ গতিশীলতা আৰু উজ্জ্বল নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ হিচাপে চিহ্নিত চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা ওৰফে কনচাৰী চৰিত্ৰটো অংকন কৰোঁতে ঔপন্যাসিকাই যেন অতি সপ্ৰতিভা দৃষ্টি নিষ্ক্ষেপ কৰিছে। কাৰণ চৰিত্ৰটো এফালে লেহুকা, পতিপ্ৰাণা হ'লেও আনফালে “প্ৰতাপচন্দ্ৰই মোক ক্ষমা খুজিবলৈ কৈছিল। মোক মাৰিছিল। মই ক্ষমা নুখুজিলো। কিয় খুজিম ? যি অপৰাধ মই কৰা নাই সেই অপৰাধৰ কাৰণে ক্ষমা কিয় খুজিম। ক্ষমা খোজা হ'লে তেওঁ মোক আকৌ বুকুত সাৱটি ল'লেহেঁতেন? তেনেকৈ ওভতাই পোৱা ভালপোৱা আৰু পৰিচয়ৰ মূল্য কি মই বুজি গৈছিলো গোভাৰজা। সেয়ে মই নিৰ্বাসন মানি লৈছিলো” (পৃ. ১৭৭)। ইয়াতে চৰিত্ৰটোৰ মাজত প্ৰতিফলিত হৈছে গুৰুত্বপূৰ্ণ সময়ত উপযুক্ত সিদ্ধান্ত ল'ব পৰা শক্তি। উপন্যাসৰ আনবোৰ নাৰী যেনে- গংগাৱতী, ৰত্নাৱলী, সোণজিৰা আদি চৰিত্ৰকেইটাক ঔপন্যাসিকাই সময়ৰ সোঁতত উঠি যোৱা চৰিত্ৰ হিচাপে অংকন কৰিছে। চৰিত্ৰকেইটাই নিজৰ অস্তিত্ব ৰক্ষা কৰাৰ চেষ্টা যেন উপন্যাসখনত দেখা পোৱা নাযায়। কেৱল আৰম্ভণিৰ পৰা শেষলৈ চন্দ্ৰপ্ৰভা ওৰফে কনচাৰী চৰিত্ৰটো উজ্জ্বল হৈ প্ৰতিভাত হৈ আছে। উপন্যাসখনত চৌধুৰীয়ে নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ চিত্ৰণৰ জৰিয়তে নাৰী নিৰ্যাতন, পুৰুষ শাসিত সমাজ ব্যৱস্থাত নাৰীৰ অৱস্থান, পুৰুষৰ প্ৰতি নাৰীৰ হৃদয়ত থকা আজন্ম সন্মান, কোমলতা, মমতীময়ী আদি বিভিন্ন দিশ আলোকপাত কৰিছে।

৫.০ সিদ্ধান্ত :

গৱেষণা পত্ৰখন বিশ্লেষণৰ অন্তত তলত উল্লেখ কৰা সিদ্ধান্তত উপনীত হ'ব পাৰি-

- (১) মধ্যযুগৰ পটভূমিত ৰচিত দেওলাংখুই উপন্যাসখনত পুৰুষতান্ত্ৰিক সমাজৰ উল্লেখ প্ৰতিফলিত।
- (২) জনজাতীয় সমাজত নাৰীৰ স্থান যে উন্নত তাৰ উল্লেখ উপন্যাসখনত প্ৰতিফলিত।
- (৩) জাত্যাভিমান আৰু পৰম্পৰাগত সংকীৰ্ণ মনোভাবৰ বাবে সমাজত নাৰীৰ স্থান নিম্নগামী কৰি ৰাখিবলৈ কৰা চেষ্টাৰ প্ৰতিফলন।

- (৪) নাৰী চৰিত্ৰ চিত্ৰণৰ জৰিয়তে প্ৰতিগৰাকী নাৰীৰ সুকীয়া ব্যক্তিত্বৰ প্ৰতিফলন।
(৫) নাৰীৰ স্বাভাৱিক কোমলতাৰ মাজত সোমাই থকা অনমনীয় মানসিক শক্তিৰ বাবে নাৰী
ত্যাগৰ মহিমাৰে মহিয়ান, এই কথাৰ প্ৰতিফলন উপন্যাসত হোৱা দেখা যায়।

গ্ৰন্থপঞ্জী :

মুখ্য উৎস :-

ৰীতা চৌধুৰী, দেওলাংখুই, জ্যোতি প্ৰকাশন, গুৱাহাটী, ২০০৫।

গৌণ উৎস :-

গোবিন্দ প্ৰসাদ শৰ্মা, নাৰীবাদ আৰু অসমীয়া উপন্যাস, অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদ, গুৱাহাটী, ২০১১।

চন্দ্ৰিলতা ফুকন (সম্পা.), অসমীয়া সাহিত্য আৰু লেখিকা, অসম লেখিকা সমাৰোহ, গুৱাহাটী,
২০০১। জুনু বৰা, নাৰী, পূৰ্বায়ণ প্ৰকাশন, গুৱাহাটী, ২০২৩।

শৈলেন ভৰালী, উপন্যাসৰ বিচাৰ বিশ্লেষণ, চন্দ্ৰ প্ৰকাশ, গুৱাহাটী, ১৯৯৩।

সন্ধ্যা দেৱী, নাৰী বন্ধন আৰু মুক্তি, অসম প্ৰকাশন পৰিষদ, গুৱাহাটী, ২০০৭।

Gender perspective of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) and household wellbeing by the forest inhabitant of Diphu-Lumding road area

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Abstract

Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) play a vital role in sustaining the livelihoods and household wellbeing of forest-dependent tribal communities in India. This study examines the gender dimensions of NTFP collection and its contribution to household wellbeing among forest inhabitants along the Diphu-Lumding road area in Karbi Anglong district of Assam. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates household surveys, gender-disaggregated interviews, focus group discussions, key informant interviews, time-use analysis, and market surveys to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights. The findings reveal a pronounced gender disparity in participation, with women playing a dominant role in the collection, processing, and marketing of NTFPs. Women not only contribute significantly to household income but also ensure food security, nutrition, and healthcare through their extensive knowledge of forest resources. The study highlights that 86.48% of market participants engaged in NTFP-based vegetable trade are women, underscoring their central role in the local economy. Despite their substantial contributions, women have limited access to market information, decision-making power, and institutional support. The study further identifies that NTFPs serve as a crucial coping mechanism during periods of economic stress and food scarcity. However, challenges such as unsustainable harvesting practices, declining forest resources, and lack of policy support continue to threaten both livelihoods and ecological sustainability. The paper emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive policies, improved market access, and sustainable management practices to enhance livelihood security while conserving forest ecosystems.

Key words : *Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), Gender Perspective, Household Wellbeing, Forest-Dependent Communities, Food Security.*

Introduction

Tribal communities across India depend heavily on Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), also referred to as Minor Forest Produce (MFP), as a crucial source of livelihood

(Dash, 2018). For most tribal households, NTFP collection is a year-round economic activity.

Although the income generated is often low and irregular, it plays a vital role in reducing seasonal income fluctuations by providing earnings from jhum products. Due to limited livelihood alternatives, this dependence on NTFP collection has become almost irreversible. A significant and well-documented feature of this sector is the high level of participation of tribal women, who form the backbone of NTFP collection activities.

Over the past few decades, the number of forest-dependent populations per hectare of forest land has remained stable or may have even increased. At the same time, forest cover has steadily declined, intensifying pressure on forest resources. With no corresponding reduction in the number of people dependent on NTFPs, improving the livelihoods of collectors—particularly tribal women—has become an increasingly complex challenge (Bhattacharya and Hayat, 2009). Although several reforms have been introduced in the regulatory framework at both national and state levels, their impact on the ground remains limited. Government policies have largely resulted in monopolistic structures that fail to address the core concerns of primary collectors.

Key issues such as ownership rights, price determination, value addition, and market access continue to be controlled by external actors, leaving NTFP collectors with little to no bargaining power. Ironically, despite being the most critical stakeholders in the NTFP value chain, collectors have minimal control over it. Compounding these livelihood challenges is the widespread prevalence of unsustainable harvesting practices, which have led to over-exploitation of forest resources. As a result, the sector faces a dual crisis: the growing vulnerability of tribal livelihoods on one hand, and the urgent need to conserve biodiversity and protect forest ecosystems on the other. Keeping in view of such crises, the present study was conducted on Gender perspective of NTFPs and household wellbeing by the forest inhabitant of Diphu-Lumding road area.

Methodology

I. Study area: The Diphu-Lumding road area, located in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, is a critical, developing, and scenic corridor connecting the hilly, forested terrain of Diphu to the railway junction hub of Lumding. The approximate coordinates for this area are between 25.8°N - 25.9°N latitude and 93.3°E - 93.4°E longitude, connecting the hilly region of Diphu to the rail hub of Lumding. The area is characterized by hilly terrain, serving as a gateway between the hilly district of Karbi Anglong and the plains of Assam. The region around Lumding is noted for its proximity to elephant reserves, making it an environmentally sensitive area and is also near the Marat Longri Wildlife Sanctuary.

II. Methods: The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the gender dimensions of NTFPs and their household wellbeing among forest-dwelling tribes and communities. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of women's and men's roles, access and benefits derived

from NTFPs based livelihood.

A multi-stage sampling technique is employed for the selection of respondents. In the first stage, forest-dependent villages are purposively selected based on the intensity of NTFP dependence and proximity to forest areas. In the second stage, households are randomly selected from each village. Special emphasis is placed on ensuring adequate representation of women respondents. From each household, both male and female members involved in NTFP-related activities are interviewed wherever possible to capture gender-differentiated perspectives.

Data's were collected through the following methods-

1. Household Survey: A structured questionnaire is administered to collect information on socio-economic characteristics, NTFP collection patterns, income contribution, time allocation, decision-making roles, access to markets, and control over earnings.
2. Gender-Disaggregated Interviews: Separate interviews with women and men are conducted to understand differences in roles, responsibilities, benefits, and constraints related to NTFP collection and trade.
3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Gender-segregated FGDs are conducted to capture collective perceptions regarding access to forest resources, traditional knowledge, seasonal availability of NTFPs, and challenges faced by women collectors.
4. Key Informant Interviews: Interviews are held with forest officials, community leaders, traders, self-help group members, and NGO representatives to gain institutional and policy-level insights.
5. Time-Use Analysis: Women's and men's daily time spent on NTFP collection, processing, household chores, and income-generating activities is documented to assess gender-based labor burdens.
6. Market Survey: Local markets are surveyed to assess women's participation in NTFP trade, pricing mechanisms, value addition practices, and gender differences in market access.

Ethical Considerations : Prior informed consent is obtained from all respondents. Special care is taken to ensure confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and voluntary participation, particularly when engaging with women respondents and indigenous communities.

Result and Discussion

Most of the forest inhabitants of study area always had to struggle for a living. Although their occupation is centered on agriculture (jhum), they have to utilize forest resources for survival. The wild plants make an important contribution, particularly to the diet of the forest inhabitants, apart from other useful products. Forest inhabitants are thoroughly acquainted with the methods of excluding the harmful substances from wild plant collections and preparing palatable recipes. Most often gathered plant parts roots, tubers, corms, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, etc.

Often food resources are stored for future use and the common of preservation of food materials are:

- (1) Cereals and seeds are dried in sun and store in bottle gourd shells or bamboo baskets.
- (2) Some fruits like *Capsicum annum* L., *Tamarindus indica* L., *Embllica officinalis* Gaertn., *Ziziphus mauritiana* Lamk. etc. are dried in sun and sometime by applying salt as preservative.
- (3) Some vegetables such as leaves of *Gnetum gnemon*, *Colocasia esculenta* etc. are dried in sun and stored for future use. *Dioscorea* sp. (phurui) and *smilax* sp. (rui kangtang) are the most important famine food of the area during the period of crises.

The preliminary study among the forest inhabitant of Diphu-Lumding Road and adjoining areas have clearly reveals that women's groups are significantly more engaged in the collection, processing, and trade of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) compared to their male counterparts. This higher level of participation underscores the critical role women play in sustaining household livelihoods and ensuring food security among forest-dependent communities. Women's involvement in NTFP-related activities extends beyond collection; they are actively engaged in sorting, processing, storing, and marketing these products, which directly contributes to household income, particularly in economically vulnerable families.

In many low-income households, female members sell NTFPs in local markets or exchange them with relatively well-off families for essential commodities such as rice, clothing, and cash. This form of barter and small-scale trade not only supplements household income but also serves as a vital coping mechanism during periods of financial stress or food scarcity. Furthermore, women bear primary responsibility for household tasks that rely heavily on forest resources, including the procurement and preparation of forest-based foods, traditional medicines, and fuelwood. Their intimate knowledge of forest ecosystems, seasonal availability of products, and sustainable harvesting practices plays a crucial role in household survival and community well-being.

In this context, NTFPs hold particular importance for women, as they directly address their responsibilities related to household food security, nutrition, health care, and energy needs. Access to diverse forest foods contributes to dietary diversity and nutritional intake, especially for women and children. Moreover, the availability of medicinal plants reduces dependence on external health services, which are often inaccessible or unaffordable for remote tribal communities.

Findings from the market survey further substantiate the dominant role of women in NTFP-based trade. The survey indicates that 86.48 percent of vegetable sellers were women, while only 13.51 percent were men, highlighting the gendered nature of forest-based market activities. This pronounced female presence in local markets reflects not only women's economic contribution but also their central position within the NTFP value chain at the grassroots level. Despite this, their role often remains undervalued and inadequately supported by policy and institutional frameworks, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive interventions to strengthen

women's participation, income security, and decision-making power in the NTFP sector.

Conclusion

Sustainable harvesting of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) can generate stable income and employment for women gatherers while conserving forest resources. NTFPs collected from forests, plantations, and agroforestry systems support food security, nutrition, and health needs of poor tribal households. The sector offers strong potential for women-led activities such as collection, processing, value addition, and marketing. With significant domestic and international demand, sustainable management of NTFPs can prevent distress sales and ensure long-term livelihood security alongside forest conservation.

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The Jungle Pharmacy : Nature's Original Self-Care

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Abstract

Zoopharmacognosy, or animal self-medication, is an evolutionary strategy where wildlife utilizes natural substances-such as plants, soils and marine organisms-to prevent or treat illness. Driven largely by parasitic stress and the absence of conventional healthcare, species across diverse ecosystems have developed sophisticated, intuitive survival behaviors. On land, parrots engage in geophagy, consuming clay to bind and detoxify dietary toxins ingested from wild seeds and fruits. Similarly, terrestrial mammals selectively ingest bitter, non-nutritive plants rich in bioactive compounds (alkaloids, tannins) to lower internal parasite loads. This phenomenon extends into marine environments where dolphins rub against specific coral species to utilize their antimicrobial properties for treating skin conditions. Furthermore, human practices like Shinrin-yoku (forest bathing) mirror this connection, utilizing natural tree chemicals (phytoncides) to enhance immune function. Studying these behavioral adaptations offers invaluable contributions to human medicine, including the discovery of novel pharmaceutical drugs, a deeper understanding of disease ecology, and a renewed emphasis on preventive healthcare. Ultimately, mapping nature's pharmacy underscores the critical importance of habitat conservation to protect these vital, living medical resources.

Key words: Zoopharmacognosy, Geophagy, Parasitic Stress, Phytochemicals, Drug Discovery

Introduction : In the modern landscape of wellness, we are often told that the secrets to health are found in the next big supplement, a curated morning routine, or a high-tech wearable. We brew pots of ginger and honey to soothe our stomachs and diffuse lavender oil to quiet our minds. We call this "intuitive health." But deep within the humid canopies of the Gombe forest and along the rugged, clay-lined riverbanks of the Amazon, a much older form of medicine is at play-one that doesn't require a prescription, a storefront, or a digital app.

Imagine a world where hospitals don't exist, pharmacies are absent, and no doctor is available when illness strikes. For wild animals, this is not imagination-it is everyday reality.

Yet, animals survive injuries, fight infections, and reduce parasite loads using an extraordinary set of behaviors collectively known as self-medication or zoopharmacognosy, derived from the Greek zoo (animal), pharmakon (drug), and gnosis (knowledge), this field of study examines how animals utilize their natural environments to prevent or treat disease (Rodriguez & Wrangham, 1993). From parrots eating clay to neutralize toxins, to dolphins rubbing coral on their skin, nature offers powerful lessons about healing, prevention and wellness. As it turns out, the original "Dr. Nature" doesn't wear a white coat; she has fur, feathers and a powerful sense of biological intuition that we are only just beginning to decode.

Animal Self-Medication

Animal self-medication refers to the deliberate use of natural substances-such as plants, soil, insects, or even marine organisms-to prevent or treat illness. Researchers have found that many species actively select materials that have medicinal value, especially during periods of sickness or parasite stress (Huffman, 2003). The concept is closely tied to ethnomedicine, as many plant-based remedies used by indigenous communities appear to mirror animal choices in the wild (Huffman, 2003). In other words, animals may have been using "traditional medicine" long before humans began documenting it.

What motivates non-human organisms to engage in self-medication behaviors ?

Wild animals face constant threats from parasites, infections, toxins, wounds, and stress. Unlike humans, they cannot rely on external medical help. So natural selection has favored individuals who can identify and use resources that improve survival.

One major reason is parasitic stress, which is one of the strongest pressures affecting animal health and fitness (Lozano, 1998). Parasites reduce energy levels, impair reproduction, and weaken immunity. Self-medication becomes an adaptive strategy to maintain health and increase chances of survival.

Geophagy : The Healing Power of Clay and Soil

One of the most well-known forms of animal self-medication is geophagy, the practice of eating soil or clay. This behavior is seen in parrots, primates, elephants, and many other animals.

Parrots and Clay Licks : Detoxification in Action

In the Amazon rainforest, parrots gather at clay licks and consume large amounts of soil. At first glance, it seems unusual-why would a bird eat mud? The answer lies in chemistry. A detailed study on parrots showed that clay provides detoxification of dietary toxins and has cytoprotective effects that help protect the digestive system (Gilardi et al., 1999). Many fruits and seeds consumed by parrots contain toxic compounds. The clay binds these harmful substances, preventing absorption and reducing damage to internal organs (Gilardi et al., 1999).

This is not random behavior-it is a life-saving adaptation.

Lessons for Humans from Nature's Doctors

Humans also practice geophagy in some cultures, particularly among pregnant women or communities facing mineral deficiency. However, the animal model highlights that soil consumption is not always about nutrients-it can be about protection against toxins (Gilardi et al., 1999).

Medicinal Plants : Nature's Wild Pharmacy

Plants contain powerful chemicals designed to defend against herbivores, pathogens, and environmental stress. Surprisingly, animals have learned to "borrow" these chemicals for their own benefit.

Zoopharmacognosy : Animals Choosing Medicines

Zoopharmacognosy refers to animals using plants with medicinal properties to treat disease. This concept has been widely documented and includes animals selecting specific leaves, bark, or fruits only during illness (Rodriguez & Wrangham, 1993).

Huffman (2003) explains that animal self-medication often involves plants rich in bioactive compounds such as alkaloids, tannins, and phenolics, which may help fight parasites, reduce inflammation, or improve gut health. These choices reflect a sophisticated relationship between animals and their environment, where survival depends on natural knowledge passed through behavior and instinct (Huffman, 2003).

Parasitic Stress and the "Medicine Hypothesis"

Parasites are among the biggest threats to animal health. Lozano (1998) discusses how parasitic stress may trigger behavioral changes, including selective feeding and use of medicinal resources. When parasite load increases, animals may consume plants that reduce infection even if those plants are bitter or low in nutrition (Lozano, 1998).

This supports an important idea: animals may tolerate unpleasant tastes or reduced energy intake if the medicinal benefit is greater than the cost. In human life, bitter or strong-tasting herbal remedies are often avoided because they are unpleasant but animal behavior suggests that taste is not always the priority-healing is (Lozano, 1998). This mindset encourages a stronger focus on preventive care and evidence-based natural remedies.

Modern Scientific Evidence : Animals That Self-Medicate

The idea of animal self-medication is no longer considered a myth or curiosity. It has become a scientifically respected field. Shurkin (2014) highlights how multiple species-including insects, birds, and mammals-display behaviors that strongly suggest medicinal intent.

These behaviors include:

- Consuming antimicrobial plant materials
- Using natural insect repellents
- Selecting anti-parasitic foods
- Applying substances on skin to reduce infection or irritation

Shurkin (2014) emphasizes that the study of animal self-medication can guide researchers in discovering new natural drugs and understanding the evolution of health behavior.

Dolphins and Coral : A Marine Pharmacy

Self-medication is not limited to forests and land animals. In marine environments, dolphins may also use natural substances for healing. A National Geographic report described evidence suggesting dolphins rub against certain coral species, possibly using them like a "pharmacy" to treat skin conditions (National Geographic, 2022). Corals and marine organisms produce unique bioactive chemicals that can have antimicrobial and protective properties. This discovery expands the scope of zoopharmacognosy beyond plants and soils into the ocean world. It also raises exciting possibilities for marine-based medicine and dermatological research.

Forest Bathing: Humans Reconnecting with Natural Healing

While animals depend on nature for survival, humans have increasingly moved away from natural environments. Yet, modern research suggests that reconnecting with forests may improve human well-being. Li (2018) describes Shinrin-Yoku or forest bathing, as the practice of immersing oneself in a forest environment to promote mental and physical health. The forest atmosphere-rich in phytoncides (natural chemicals released by trees)-may reduce stress, support immune function, and improve mood (Li, 2018). This idea reflects a key message: nature is not only a resource for animals-it is also a healing space for humans.

Wild Health: Animals as Teachers of Wellness

Engel (2002) highlights how animals maintain health through natural behaviors such as selective feeding, movement, rest patterns, and social interaction. Animals do not just react to illness-they actively engage in behaviors that prevent disease such as

- Resting when injured
- Avoiding contaminated food sources
- Seeking medicinal plants during infection
- Grooming to remove parasites

Engel (2002) suggests that humans can learn from these strategies by adopting more preventive, nature-aligned lifestyles.

Why Animal Self-Medication Matters for Human Medicine

Animal self-medication offers valuable contributions to science and healthcare:

1. **Discovery of New Drugs:** Animals may guide researchers toward plants and compounds with therapeutic value. Many modern medicines have origins in natural substances. Observing animal behavior may reveal promising new candidates (Huffman, 2003).
2. **Better Understanding of Disease Ecology:** Studying how animals manage parasites and toxins helps scientists understand health patterns in ecosystems (Lozano, 1998).
3. **Conservation and Habitat Protection:** If animals rely on specific plants or soils for medicine, habitat destruction could remove their "natural pharmacy." Protecting ecosystems becomes essential not only for biodiversity but also for animal health (Shurkin, 2014).
4. **Inspiration for Preventive Healthcare:** Animals remind us that health is not only about

treatment-it is about prevention, balance, and living in harmony with the environment (Engel, 2002).

Conclusion : Nature's Wisdom in Healing

Animals are not helpless victims of disease. They are intelligent survivors who use nature's pharmacy in remarkable ways. Parrots detoxify their diet using clay (Gilardi et al., 1999), mammals select medicinal plants during illness (Rodriguez & Wrangham, 1993), and parasite pressure shapes healing behaviors in the wild (Lozano, 1998). Even dolphins may rely on coral-based treatments for skin health (National Geographic, 2022). These examples show that self-medication is not an accident-it is an evolutionary strategy. As humans search for new medicines and sustainable health solutions, animal self-medication offers both inspiration and scientific direction (Huffman, 2003; Shurkin, 2014).

Ultimately, nature does not merely surround life-it supports life. And if we pay attention, animals may teach us not only how to heal, but how to live well.

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From Anticipation to Habit: Dopamine, Short form Videos and Infinite Scroll

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Abstract

The shift from long digital content to the micro-content era has changed how the human brain processes rewards. Micro-content consists of brief, constantly delivered pieces that are tailored by algorithms to keep users engaged. This chapter examines the neurobiological foundations of such engagement, with particular attention to dopaminergic reward mechanisms. It explores the neurobiological mechanisms involved in the watching short-form video content, specifically focusing on the role of dopamine as a driver of anticipation and habit formation.

Key Words- Dopamine, Reward Anticipation, Reels, Social Media Platform, Habit Formation

1. Introduction

In today's digital world, the "infinite scroll" has become a key part of our leisure time. Whether it's Instagram Reels, or YouTube Shorts, or any other such social platform they have figured out a psychological trick that turns casual watching into a habit. At the core of this trend is not just entertainment; it's dopamine.

Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that enables us to expect rewards. It creates the motivation to take action in pursuit of the exciting rewards that lie ahead. It acts as the driving force behind our efforts. However, it is not a chemical associated with pleasure; rather, it is an important neurotransmitter that aids in our survival and reproduction.

2. The Role Dopamine Plays

Just because an event causes a dopamine release doesn't necessarily mean it's something we enjoy or find pleasurable. In fact, once we receive the anticipated reward, we often end up feeling empty and unfulfilled. No level of stimulation can provide the sense of fulfillment we are truly seeking. It appears that we are perpetually wanting more and never fully satisfied, and the more we chase after stimulation, the worse it becomes. In such a state of heightened stimulation, any task requiring focus becomes much more difficult to accomplish, leading us to procrastinate.

To sum up dopamine's main function is to motivate us to take action in order to achieve the expected rewards crucial for survival or reproduction. This is the fundamental purpose of dopamine. Unfortunately, in today's world, the process has been hijacked which leads to many unintended consequences like different types of addiction including short form videos

and Infinite scroll which has become the heartbeat of our downtime.

3. The Problem

3.1. Hijacking of Dopamine Neurotransmitter

Visit your newsfeed, watch a few recommended videos on a related topic, and notice what occurs. It will quickly suggest another video for you to watch, leading you to continue watching one after another. In a way, instead of using the internet to find information, the internet has become the one using us. It does so by hijacking our focus and making us unproductive and as a result restless.

Social media notification are great example of how are brain are being hijacked. Each time we notice a notification, we look forward to the reward we believe we'll gain by clicking on it, which triggers the release of dopamine in our brains. However it doesn't make us happy or fulfil us- at least not for long.

3.2. The Variable Reward System and Short form Video Platform

Short-form video platforms like reels and YouTube Shorts function as digital spaces that provide different rewards. Each swipe shows fresh content that can have surprising emotional or informational value. Users don't know if the next video will be funny, moving, or just trivial, which keeps them interested. Moreover, algorithmic personalization improve this experience by constantly tailoring content to increase user engagement and interaction. The near-frictionless nature of scrolling minimizes cognitive and physical effort, while the rapid turnover of stimuli prevents habituation. As a result, dopaminergic reward circuits are repeatedly activated in short intervals, reinforcing continued use.

Our brains are naturally wired to seek closure. Short-form videos provide a "micro-narrative" that resolves in 15 to 60 seconds. This rapid-fire cycle of Tension - Resolution provides a sense of accomplishment without the cognitive effort required to read a book or watch a feature-length film.

3.3. The Zeigarnik Effect

The Zeigarnik Effect indicates that people tend to recall unfinished or disrupted tasks more effectively than those that have been completed. Social media algorithms take advantage of this by presenting a continuous series of loops. As soon as you finish one video, the next one begins automatically, producing a cliffhangersensation that makes it hard to stop using your phone.

3.4. Habit Formation and Behavioral Dependence

The engagement with dopamine from reels leads to regular usage habits. Over time, feelings like boredom, stress, or brief breaks can trigger the behavior of opening the app. This pattern of cues and responses is typical of behavioral conditioning and is similar to what we see in other behavioral addictions that don't involve substances. While excessive short-form video consumption isn't officially labeled as addictive in diagnostic manuals, it exhibits important traits of addictive behavior. These traits include compulsive use, reduced self-

control, and continued use even when there are negative consequences.

4.The Solution -Dopamine Detox

As the digital dopamine drip becomes a constant presence, the idea of a Dopamine Detox has gained popularity as a way to counteract its effects. The Dopamine Detox helps reduce stimulation, allowing us to return to a more natural state. By stepping away from the instant gratification of short videos, gaming, and social media alerts, the brain's receptors can down-regulate. This process helps restore sensitivity to lower-intensity, slow rewards, like focused work, reading, or physical exercise.

A Dopamine detox may be 48 hour complete dopamine detox- which include a complete 48 hour of eliminating all the source of external stimulation. 24 hour dopamine detox which is similar as 48 hour dopamine detox but is by definition shorter. And partial dopamine detox- It entails removing our biggest source of stimulation.

In a dopamine detox, individuals frequently replace high-dopamine behaviors with less stimulating ones such as reading, walking, journaling, meditating, or engaging in concentrated work. Although these activities may not provide immediate gratification, they can enhance focus and result in greater fulfillment in the long run.

5.Conclusion

The rise of short-form video marks a significant change in how we take in information and find enjoyment. By tapping into the brain's dopamine response, these platforms have changed a simple leisure activity into a cycle that feeds on itself. While it's clear that quick entertainment is convenient, the downside-a higher baseline for dopamine and a scattered attention span-is something we need to handle carefully.

We can choose to control our focus or let someone else take it away from us. By steering clear of overly stimulating activities that hinder our ability to stay calm and focused, we will discover that we can handle significant tasks with greater ease than ever before.

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Bridging the Centuries: A Comparative Analysis of Mary Wollstonecraft and Alexandra Kollontai's Feminist Perspectives

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Abstract

*This paper conducts a comprehensive, comparative analysis of the feminist philosophies of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) and Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), spanning the enlightenment roots of liberal feminism to the revolutionary demands of Marxist feminism. Wollstonecraft, through *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, advocated for rational education and civic rights as the primary means to achieve female equality within a reformed liberal society. She diagnosed women's subjugation as a failure of Enlightenment ideals applied to the female sex, resulting in the cultivation of debilitating weakness and dependence. In stark contrast, Kollontai, drawing heavily on historical materialism, argued that true liberation required the complete overhaul of capitalist structures, asserting that gender oppression was inextricable from economic exploitation and the private ownership of property. Her prescription involved the collectivization of domestic labor and a radical transformation of sexual and familial relationships. By examining their distinct conceptualizations of oppression (intellectual repression versus economic and sexual subjugation) and their proposed mechanisms for change (reform versus revolution), the study highlights the fundamentally divergent pathways proposed by these two critical historical waves of feminism.*

Key words : Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Wollstonecraft, Kollontai, Gender Equality, Social Revolution, Economic Independence, Reproductive Labour.

1. Introduction

The history of feminist thought is not a monolithic narrative, but a dynamic, contested progression of ideas shaped by geopolitical and economic realities. Mary Wollstonecraft, writing during the intellectual ferment of the late 18th century, established the bedrock of modern liberal feminism. Her work positioned women as rational beings, deserving of the same rights and educational opportunities afforded to men, seeking integration and reform within the nascent liberal state.

Two centuries later, in the explosive context of the Russian Revolution, Alexandra Kollontai emerged as the preeminent theorist of Marxist feminism. Kollontai viewed Wollstonecraft's vision of legal and political equality as fundamentally insufficient, arguing that

the economic base capitalism and the private, nuclear family was the true source of female subjugation. This comparative study aims not merely to contrast two historical figures, but to delineate the core theoretical tenets, profound areas of divergence, and enduring, mutually exclusive solutions offered by these seminal thinkers to the "woman question" in the global discourse on gender justice.

2. Objectives

The primary objectives of this comprehensive study are:

1. To conduct a deep textual analysis of Wollstonecraft's critique of gender inequality, focusing specifically on her moral philosophy regarding reason, virtue, and the necessity of rational education for the creation of autonomous female citizens.
2. To explore Kollontai's framework of historical materialism, analyzing her critique of capitalism, the bourgeois family unit as an economic cell, and her revolutionary vision for sexual, economic, and social freedom.
3. To systematically contrast the ideological solutions proposed by both figures: incremental institutional reform within a liberal framework (Wollstonecraft) versus a foundational, revolutionary social and economic transformation (Kollontai).
4. To assess the contemporary legacy and relevance of their contributions, demonstrating how their divergent approaches continue to inform the schisms within modern feminist political theory, particularly concerning state intervention, economic policies, and the family structure.

3. Methodology

This research employs a robust historical-critical comparative methodology. The study operates on two levels: first, a meticulous close reading of the primary texts to establish the internal logic and specific terminology of each philosopher; and second, a critical historical contextualization that places their ideas within their respective political and economic environments: Wollstonecraft in the Age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and Kollontai within early 20th-century revolutionary Marxism. The comparison systematically maps their core concepts, including the diagnosis of oppression, the structure of the ideal society, the mechanism of change, and the definition of the liberated woman. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of why their solutions are so divergent, rooted in their fundamentally different philosophical starting points.

4. Literature Review

The existing scholarship on Wollstonecraft and Kollontai reveals two distinct, yet interconnected, fields of inquiry.

4.1. Wollstonecraft and the Enlightenment Project

Wollstonecraft is unequivocally established as the foundational theorist of first-wave liberal feminism. Scholars like Barbara Taylor and Miriam Brody emphasize that

Wollstonecraft's feminism is an application of Enlightenment liberal philosophy specifically Lockean notions of reason and rights to the female sex. Her primary critique, as detailed in *A Vindication*, is not against men *per se*, but against the societal and educational structures that cultivate women as "mere objects of desire" rather than as rational, virtuous individuals. The established literature views her as seeking full integration and equality within the existing public sphere through civic rights, property ownership, and, most crucially, a rigorous, mixed-sex education designed to foster mental independence. Her vision is ultimately a moral one, prioritizing virtue over transient happiness. The prevailing critical consensus positions her as one whose loyalty remained with the possibilities of a perfected liberal order.

4.2. Kollontai and Historical Materialism

Kollontai's work is situated within the specialized canon of Marxist and Socialist Feminism, a tradition that views gender oppression as a secondary, yet crucial, component of class exploitation. Drawing significantly from Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Kollontai redefined the "woman question" not as an issue of consciousness or rights, but as a problem of economic organization. Biographers and critics, including Richard Stites and Cathy Porter, highlight Kollontai's unique contribution: the integration of revolutionary socialist politics with a radical critique of heterosexual monogamy and bourgeois morality. Marxist feminist analyses underline her argument that the bourgeois family structure, by privatizing domestic and reproductive labor, forces women into a state of economic dependence analogous to prostitution, thereby acting as a powerful mechanism for capitalist stability. Unlike Wollstonecraft's moral reform, Kollontai demands a structural transformation that socializes the costs of reproduction and domesticity, making the proletariat revolution the *sine qua non* of female emancipation.

5. Findings and Discussions

The comparative analysis reveals that the core ideological difference between Wollstonecraft and Kollontai lies in their diagnosis of the cause of women's subjection, which in turn dictates their utterly opposed solutions.

5.1. The Diagnosis of Oppression: the Mind vs. The Mode of Production

Wollstonecraft saw the problem as one of intellectual and moral misrecognition. She argued that women were intellectually capable but were rendered functionally inferior by an education system that focused solely on cultivating "sensibility" and superficial charms to attract a husband. She stated that "The divine right of husbands, like the divine right of kings, may, it is hoped, in this enlightened age, be contested without danger." Her focus was to grant women the mental fortitude (reason) to become autonomous agents, not sentimental subordinates. Kollontai, by contrast, dismissed this intellectual critique as bourgeois idealism. For her, the oppression was material and economic, rooted in women's role as unpaid domestic laborers and as economically dependent appendages of men. She viewed marriage as an economic transaction, stating that "The family ceases to be an essential unit of production and exchange,

and becomes merely a consumer unit." The ultimate source of oppression was the private ownership of the means of production, which necessitated the private, isolated maintenance of the labor force (the family). Kollontai's fight was for liberation from the kitchen and the cradle, seeing them as political, not private, concerns.

5.2. The Institution of the Family and Sexuality

The most radical divergence occurs in their views on the family.

Wollstonecraft critiques the current state of marriage where women are often treated as chattel but ultimately holds up the ideal of a family unit founded on friendship, mutual respect, and rational affection. Her goal was to perfect the institution of marriage, making it a site of moral growth and stable citizenship. She was fundamentally conservative regarding sexual morality, believing virtue was essential for public freedom.

Kollontai views the bourgeois family not as an institution to be reformed, but as one that must wither away. It is the final ideological and economic bastion of capitalism. Her vision required the state to assume the responsibilities of motherhood childcare, feeding, laundry thereby freeing women for productive labor and establishing the economic autonomy that allows for true sexual liberation. Kollontai's controversial concept of "Winged Eros" advocated for emotional connection and fluid sexual relations unfettered by economic necessity or rigid monogamy, seeing personal relationships as a cultural complement to the revolutionary change, rather than a moral foundation.

5.3. The Mechanism for Change: Reform vs. Revolution

Their proposed pathways for achieving equality are mutually exclusive.

Wollstonecraft is the quintessential reformer. Her mechanism for change is incremental and institutional: petitioning for education, advocating for expanded legal rights, and appealing to men's reason to correct social injustices. She believed that once women were politically and intellectually recognized as equals, the system would self-correct, integrating them into the existing structure of governance and economic life.

Kollontai is the absolute revolutionary. She argued that formal equality (voting, legal rights) was a bourgeois distraction that left the economic exploitation of the working-class woman untouched. Change, for Kollontai, could only come through the abolition of private property, the violent overthrow of the capitalist state, and the establishment of a socialist economy. Her mechanism required state intervention to socialize all reproductive labor, effectively paying society's debt to women. Equality was not an idea to be adopted, but a material condition to be built.

5.4. Enduring Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

The theoretical schism between Wollstonecraft and Kollontai remains the primary division in contemporary feminism.

Wollstonecraft's legacy is evident in modern liberal feminism, which focuses on legislative redress (e.g., gender pay gap laws, anti-discrimination policy, political quotas) and achieving

equal representation in board rooms and government. This approach seeks to shatter the "glass ceiling" without fundamentally questioning the capitalist structure underneath.

Kollontai's legacy is carried forward by socialist and radical feminisms. Her critique informs current debates on the valuation of unpaid labor, the crisis of childcare, the call for universal state-funded social services, and critiques of global capitalism's gendered effects on the global South. When modern feminists argue that women "can't have it all" within the current system or call for systemic overhauls, they are echoing Kollontai's materialist analysis. Their juxtaposition reveals that feminist goals are not monolithic but are fundamentally shaped by the philosophical and economic frameworks used to diagnose the problem. Understanding the transition from Wollstonecraft's emphasis on the mind to Kollontai's focus on the mode of production is essential for grasping the full scope of feminist thought.

6. Conclusion

Mary Wollstonecraft and Alexandra Kollontai stand as monumental, yet antithetical, figures in feminist history. Wollstonecraft's emphasis on reason and rights provided the necessary philosophical basis for women's entry into the public, political world. Her enduring fight is for equitable access, representation, and legal parity goals that continue to drive reform movements globally. Kollontai's work, however, acts as a perpetual radical challenge, a powerful reminder that material conditions and economic structures often dictate the limits of formal equality. She correctly identified that, even with the vote and education, women would remain burdened by the private, unpaid demands of the home. Their dialectical relationship reform versus revolution, mind versus material, private virtue versus public socialization continues to define the theoretical landscape of feminism. Only by integrating the intellectual and political gains championed by Wollstonecraft with the economic and structural demands raised by Kollontai can contemporary society hope to achieve true, comprehensive gender justice.

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Exploring Women in Politics: A Study on Women in Decision Making Process of Local Governance With Special Reference to Charaideo, Assam

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Abstract

Women's political participation is a prerequisite of democracy. It has been widely recognised as the agenda of various international researches and symposiums. Women's participation in the decision making process of the local governance system is a prerequisite not only for development but also a necessity for the society. In contrast to the equal benefits given by democracy, the participation of women in the decision making process is qualitatively low and it is a problem of special concern. The presence of women in the decision making process is confined to that of numerical significance. Although a large number of women is seen to be participating in the election and voting, the challenge is to estimate the actual participation of women in the decision making process. Besides, the nature of participation of women in rural and urban governance differs. This paper attempts to study the nature of political participation of rural and urban women in the decision-making process of the local governing bodies.

Key words : Political participation, Women, Rural, Urban, Local Governance

Introduction

The concept of participation is by no means new. Participation is one of those terms that are veritably delicate to define because it is extensively used in moment's language; the compass and meaning that are credited to it frequently vary extensively. The term 'participation' is very often used to cover all forms of conduct by which citizens take part in the operation of the administration. According to the Human Development Report 1993, prepared the United Nations Development Programme, "Participation means that people are closely involved in the economic, social, cultural and political process that affects their lives. People may, in some cases, have complete and direct control over these processes; in other cases the control may be partial or indirect. The important thing is that people have constant access to decision-making and power. Participation in this sense is an essential element of human development." In this context, thus, political participation means not only exercising the right to vote, but also power sharing, co-decision making, co-policy-making at all the strata of the governance of the state.

Women's political participation is an interesting area of study. In addition to that, political participation of women has remained one of the most debated and deliberated issues of

Indian democracy. The status of women is measured internationally by the participation of women in politics and their empowerment. Especially in local governance system, the participation of women in politics has an undeniable impact on developmental outcomes and social changes. As political participation is not just about voting and activism, women's participation in decision making accounts for development and standardisation of a country. Positive transformative processes for societies, including laws, policies, services, institutions, and social norms, are facilitated by women's greater involvement in decision making. Their involvement brings a gendered approach to the frame. Both men and women are impacted by these choices. Therefore, there is a great importance of women in all decision-making processes.

Review of Literature

Women participation in politics is a cornerstone for democratic representation. Presence of women in politics can diverse the policy goals towards their empowerment. But this presence is effective when it is of qualitative significance. Scholars like Anne Phillips (1995) in her work *The Politics of Presence* argue that more women in positions of power result in different policy outcomes, particularly on issues such as family policy, healthcare, and domestic violence. She in her work also discusses the distinction between women's numerical representation and the actual advocacy for gender-sensitive policies, highlighting the importance of substantive representation in advancing women's issues.

Women in local governance mean minimizing the traditional feeling of people about the status of women in our society, particularly in keeping women under the subjugation of men. Women in Panchayats act as agents of social revolution. However, there are certain aspects that determine and impact their role. In this regard, Susheela Kaushik in her work *Women and Panchayati Raj* provides an introduction to the state of PRIs with special reference to various dimensions of women's participation. She highlighted that the electoral operations did not permeate to the women of the rural areas due to the very nature of electioneering, which has become an exercise of political manipulation rather than providing political education to the masses.

Women's role in decision-making process is the most necessary imperative to promote gender equality and equitable development. In this context, Kamal Kumar Srivastava in *Women in Decentralised Rural Governance* highlights the role of women in decentralised rural governance. Laxmi Devi in her work *Women in Politics Management and Decision Making* studies why the role of women is considered inferior to men in politics and decision making. In the politics women are often taught to be docile, submissive. For this different factors have been used as justification. In this context, Endale Alemu Hora (2014) in her work *Factors the Affect Women Participation in Leadership and Decision Making Positions* highlights all the factors that influence the participation of a women in the decision making process of the institutions. The women representatives of the local governance system, especially in the rural

society, go through such hindrances. In this context, Raheena P A and Sara Neena in their work *Participation of Women for the Development of Civil Society: A Study among the Women Representatives in Local Governance* aims to assess the involvement of the women representatives in different decision making processes and what are the difficulties they face while trying to implement such decisions.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the nature of political participation of rural and urban women representatives in the decision-making process of grass root democracy i.e. Panchayats and Municipalities.
2. To examine the factors influencing the participation of rural and urban women in the local governance.

Methodology of the Study

The research aims to study the women's political participation in the local governance emphasising their participation in the decision-making process. The type of the study used for the research is both descriptive and analytical. To attain the aim of the study, both primary and secondary methods of data collection have been used. For the primary data, interviews and survey were conducted among the women members of rural and urban local governance. As for the secondary data, the main sources include books, articles, journals, thesis works, and internet resources.

The population of the research covers the women representatives in the Panchayats of Rajapukhuri and Naharpukhuri and Municipalities of Moran and Sonari of the Charaideo district. To select the samples of the total population, Purposive sampling has been used so that the Heads of the decision-making bodies. After the collection of the data, the paper tries to make a descriptive and analytical study to understand the nature of participation of the rural and urban women in the local governance of the selected areas of the district.

Women's Political Participation in Assam

Women's participation in the politics of Assam has a long history. The history has been an evidence of such participation of women. The women gave their opinions in governing the kingdoms or governed the kingdoms themselves. There are several instances of women of Assam going into the battle field and fighting the enemies with great valour. During the freedom struggle movement the number of participation of women was significant. They have engaged themselves in protests, demonstrations, campaigns and voting, associated with other forms of political participation. Several women organisations like MahilaSamitis, the Assam MahilaSangha and the Assam Women Writers Association put forward their immense support. However, after independence the scenario varied. The participation of the women of Assam did continue in a massive form but their roles were limited. Especially in electoral politics the role of women of Assam was not satisfactory. Women in massive numbers agitated during the Assam Movement of 1979-85. Coming to the present context, the anti-CAA movement

witnessed huge numbers of women taking to the streets. It consisted of female students from schools, colleges and universities, actresses, female social activists, housewives, business women and many more. But there remained a gap between participation in social movements and party politics.

Women's participation in the rural and urban governance of Assam is significant enough. It cannot be denied that the rural and urban women are becoming more politically conscious and their participation has increased. But the underlying fact is that despite of this increase, several women are left out. And even they participate their role in decision making process is limited.

Women's Political Participation in Charaideo

Charaideo is the first permanent capital of the Ahom kingdom established by the first most revered Ahom king Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha. The district has always occupied a prominent place in the pages of the history of Assam. It was carved out of Sivasagar district in 2015. Its headquarters are located at Sonari. The district consists of 36 Gram Panchayats and 2 Municipalities.

The district has witnessed massive participation of women in political grounds. During many political protests the women of the district participated actively here. For example, during the anti-CAA movement the women came out to the streets in huge numbers. Now, in the political institutions like the Municipalities and Panchayats, women representatives are found in significant numbers. Women representative in the municipalities and the panchayats are actively participating in the procedures of the institutions. However, the active participation of the women in the decision-making process is in question especially in the rural governance.

Factors Influencing Women's Political Participation in the Area

The study focuses on the factors influencing the political participation of rural and urban women in the decision-making process in the Panchayats of Rajapukhuri and Naharpukhuri and the Municipalities of Sonari and Moran respectively.

Political Factors: Charaideo has seen massive participation of women in politics. But they are under-represented in the highest political levels. It has been observed that one of the biggest factors is the domination of the politics by the old male elites. Women who have been in the decision making are mostly new to their office. As they are new to their office, they find it difficult to fight the monopoly of the political power. The women find it difficult to make them heard. As a result of which their views often remain unheard. The dominance of the elder politicians does not provide them with enough space to implement their decision making power. Their opinions remain unheard because they are nor even being called to attend the meetings. As a result of which they remain ignorant of the ongoing affairs of the Panchayat.

Social Factors: Patriarchy exists in the roots of a social system. The social system oppose their participation in the decision making process. It is the system that indirectly directs their participation. Women, thus, have in their shoulders the dual responsibilities of politics and

household. A woman is also engaged in the household activities. This results in her lack of knowledge of the political process. The representatives then take decision as per the direction of her male counterparts. This restrains her effective functioning in the decision making process. Cultural Factors: Women's participation in the decision making process is highly shaped by the cultural attitudes, traditional beliefs existing in the society. The traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes makes it difficult for a woman to fully make use of her potential in the decision making process. The so-called "traditional cultural values" militate against the advancement and participation of women in the decision-making process.

Economic Factors: It has been observed in the district that women lack the economic base required for their participation. The lack of economic resources limits their participation. It is found out in the Municipalities and Panchayats that the women members there are not paid with regular payments. The amount they receive against their work is in the form of remuneration. This remuneration is not allotted to them on a regular basis. Most of the time, they claim for their deserved remuneration. Thus, becoming an active participant in the decision-making process with such burden is quite difficult.

Educational Factors : As found out in the study that majority of the women representatives are either HSLC passed or 12th passed. Being a representative does not require higher education. However, this has actually affected the qualitative work of the women members. Because of the lack of quality education women representatives both in rural and urban governance have less concern for gendered political awareness, lobbying skills and networking.

Psychological Factors: The narrow perception that "woman is not meant for politics" influences the functioning of the women representatives. It has been observed that a woman struggle more than her male counterpart during the implementation of a decision. Women are much less likely than men to be considered leaders.

Political Participation of Rural and Urban Women in the Panchayats and Municipalities: An Analysis

Women representatives make up over half of the members involved in decision making in both panchayats and municipalities. It implies that the reservation quota as provided by the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act has been fulfilled. A majority of the women representatives are members of nuclear families. This means that they have fewer individuals with which to share their obligations for both politics and family. The study found out the absence of female as the Heads of the local governing bodies.

In both Panchayats and Municipalities, the women are primarily involved in the development of their wards and annuity programs. In both of the cases, public ignorance, lack of cooperation, lack of enough funding, a stereotyped mind-set, and officials' lack of cooperation are issues that make it difficult to implement decisions. Though the women are aware of their duties, they are unable to regularly attend the meetings and participate passively in the decision-making process. There is adequate quantitative representation of women. The idea of politics of presence is prevalent.

However, the picture of the women's participation in the decision making process of the urban local bodies is somewhat more promising. They are seen voicing their opinions loud. The members have easier accessibility to their resources. They are more politically socialised as the heads of the body are keen to listen to their opinions and try to take include their opinions in the decision-making process.

The mere presence of women members does not imply gender equality and equitable development. It is quite evident that the participation of rural and urban women in the local governing bodies i.e. Panchayats and Municipalities is significant enough. Their participation in the decision-making process of the local governing bodies is also visible. However, the participation is significant only in terms of numbers. This brings into notice the concept of "politics of presence and not ideas". Especially in the Panchayats, because of the passive presence of the women in the decision making process, the policies have not received adequate visionary. Furthermore, women's capacity to participate in leading roles of decision-making process is restrained due to over burden of family responsibilities, cultural expectations and stereotyping that a "woman's place is in the home". As a result, women do not see themselves to be important in the decision-making process. Besides, the socio-cultural, political, economic factors and lack of political socialisation highly influence women's involvement in the decision-making process.

Conclusion

It is argued that 'women have the right to participate in projects which profoundly affect their lives, that their participation can make the difference between success or failure of these projects, and that participation gives confidence to marginalised groups previously voiceless in the community'. In order to address the problems associated with power dynamics and the barriers to women's full involvement, research and intervention are necessary to guarantee the creation of suitable structures to promote such participation.

Thus, from the above analysis, we can conclude that political education is the need of the hour. Training and guidance on administrative work must be provided to them so that they can understand the role and procedure of the local governing bodies. Additionally, there is a need of sensitising the thinking attitude of the male counterparts towards women empowerment and to extend full support and cooperation for active participation in local governance.

Women's admittance and active engagement will introduce women's preferences and visions to the political sphere and alter the current political landscape. Women are increasingly joining governing bodies. It is critical that all institutions address the unique requirements of women like education, gender roles, division of labour, etc. Efforts must be made to bring about this transformation in society. Only reserving quotas for women in the local governance is not enough. There is a need of an orientation since childhood for political participation. In this regard, family plays a huge role. Only then the goal of women empowerment through political representation can be realised.

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Urban Zoology : Wildlife in the Concrete Jungle

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Abstract

Urban zoology is an emerging discipline focused on how animals adapt, survive and evolve within human-dominated landscapes. As rapid global urbanization converts natural habitats into residential and industrial zones, it reshapes wildlife species composition, behavior and ecological interactions rather than eradicating them. Unlike traditional ecology that studies pristine environments, urban zoology views cities as dynamic ecosystems characterized by unique selective pressures including pollution, artificial light, noise, heat islands and habitat fragmentation. Wildlife within cities is categorized into urban avoiders, urban adapters and urban exploiters. Exploiters directly benefit from human resources as demonstrated in Indian cities by house crows, rhesus macaques and stray dogs. To survive, urban fauna displays remarkable behavioral and physiological plasticity such as shifting vocalization frequencies, altering circadian rhythms and exhibiting heightened cognitive flexibility. While altered food webs and human-wildlife conflicts (e.g., property damage, safety concerns) pose significant challenges, urban green spaces like wetlands and parks function as vital biodiversity hotspots. Urban zoologists collaborate with policymakers to mitigate conflicts through eco-sensitive urban planning, habitat restoration and citizen science. Ultimately, this field bridges the gap between modern development and wildlife conservation fostering a sustainable coexistence in shared ecosystems.

Key words: Urban Ecosystems, Adaptation, Behavioral Plasticity, Urban Exploiters, Human-Wildlife Conflict.

Urban zoology is an emerging field within zoology that concentrates on the study of animals inhabiting urban and peri-urban environments. As urban areas grow swiftly worldwide, natural environments are being converted more and more into residential, commercial, and industrial areas. This transformation does not eradicate wildlife; instead, it reshapes species composition, behaviour, and ecological interactions. The goal of urban zoology is to comprehend the ways in which animals adjust, endure, and at times flourish in ecosystems that are dominated by humans. The study of urban zoology investigates the variety, distribution, behaviour, physiology, and evolution of animals within urban environments. It encompasses research on mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and even microorganisms found in

buildings, parks, drainage systems, and urban forests. Unlike traditional wildlife ecology, which often focuses on pristine or protected habitats, urban zoology recognises cities as dynamic ecosystems with unique environmental pressures such as pollution, artificial light, noise, heat islands, and fragmented habitats. Urban areas create novel ecological niches. Building structures imitate cliffs for nesting birds; underground sewage systems maintain stable temperatures for rodents; gardens and decorative plants supply nectar and sustenance for pollinators. As a result, the composition of species in urban areas often varies considerably from that in the adjacent rural landscapes.

Scope and Ecological Pressures

Wildlife species in cities are typically divided into three categories. Urban avoiders are species that are sensitive to human disturbance and habitat alteration. These species typically decline or disappear with urbanisation. The other species category is called urban adapters that adjust their behaviour and diet to survive in moderately urbanised areas. The third category is urban exploiters, which includes species that benefit directly from human activities and resources. For example, the house crow (*Corvus splendens*) and rock pigeon (*Columba livia*) are classic urban exploiters in many Indian cities. Among mammals, the rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) has successfully adapted to temple complexes and urban neighbourhoods, often relying on food provided intentionally or unintentionally by humans. Similarly, stray dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) form complex social groups within cities. In India, cities like Mumbai have gained recognition for their unique coexistence with wildlife, including the presence of leopards near urban settlements. Urban environments impose new selective pressures that influence animal behaviour and physiology. Many urban birds modify their vocalisations to overcome traffic noise, often singing at higher frequencies. Nocturnal activity patterns are increasingly observed in mammals to avoid human disturbance. Artificial light at night affects circadian rhythms, breeding cycles, and migration patterns. Urban heat islands may also influence metabolic rates and thermal tolerance. Some species exhibit increased boldness, reduced fear responses, and enhanced cognitive flexibility, traits that favour survival in unpredictable urban settings. Studies show that urban populations are adapted to pollutants, dietary shifts, or altered predator-prey dynamics. In urban environments, food webs frequently depend on human-derived resources, including waste and agricultural byproducts. Relationships between predators and prey persist, though sometimes in altered forms. As an example, urban raptors hunt pigeons and rodents, thereby aiding in the regulation of pest populations. Bees, butterflies, and other pollinators are essential for sustaining urban biodiversity by pollinating native and ornamental plants. Nonetheless, the use of pesticides and the fragmentation of habitat present considerable dangers. Parks, roadside plantations, wetlands, and urban forests are examples of urban green spaces that act as biodiversity hotspots and ecological corridors. In India, wetlands like Deepor Beel in Guwahati serve as vital habitats for migratory birds amidst the growth of the metropolitan area.

Human-Wildlife Conflict and Mitigation

A key issue that urban zoology deals with is the conflict between humans and wildlife. With the overlap of animal populations and human settlements, interactions become more frequent. Common urban problems include crop raiding by monkeys, dog bites, bird droppings, and property damage. In certain urban areas, leopards from adjacent woodlands sporadically venture into neighbourhoods, causing safety concerns. Such conflicts often arise due to habitat fragmentation, food scarcity in natural habitats, or improper waste management in cities. Urban zoologists collaborate with conservationists and policymakers to create mitigation strategies, which include public awareness campaigns, enhanced waste disposal systems, sterilisation programs for stray animals and habitat restoration efforts.

Conservation and Future Outlook

Despite the belief that cities lack biological vitality, urban areas can sustain significant biodiversity. Urban biodiversity plays a role in ecosystem services such as pest management, pollination, climate regulation, and the mental well-being of residents. Conservation strategies in urban environments focus on safeguarding and revitalising green spaces, establishing biodiversity parks, promoting native species planting initiatives, implementing eco-sensitive urban planning, creating wildlife corridors to link fragmented habitats, and engaging in citizen science initiatives. Involvement of the public in bird counts, butterfly surveys, and biodiversity documentation improves ecological data gathering and promotes environmental awareness.

Conclusion

As more than half of the world's population resides in urban areas, the importance of urban zoology is increasingly recognised. Urban ecosystems will be further shaped by climate change, rapid infrastructure development, and population growth. To guarantee that humans and wildlife can live together, ecological principles must be incorporated into sustainable urban planning. Urban zoology expands our comprehension of adaptation and evolution while also fostering harmonious coexistence in shared environments. Cities ought to be regarded not as ecological voids, but rather as developing ecosystems in which wildlife shows extraordinary resilience and adaptability. In conclusion, urban zoology bridges the gap between traditional wildlife studies and modern urban development. This field promotes informed conservation efforts, responsible urban planning, and a greater awareness of biodiversity in daily life by acknowledging cities as valid ecological systems.

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Social Media's Influence on Women's Identity and Empowerment in the Digital Age

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Abstract

Women for generations, have played a vital role in building a society they develop in. Women as an integral part of the society, majorly comprise of and contribute to it. Today's era is the era of social media whose presence and active involvement has swiftly and widely spread the ideologies for women empowerment. It plays a significant role in shaping and transforming modern society. Society. Social media has become the agent of social change which helped and supported women's empowerment in various aspects such as mobilizing attention of global community towards women's rights and challenges discrimination and stereotypes across the globe. Social media has given platform to discuss issues and challenges of women through blogs, chats, online campaign, online discussion forums, and online communities which is mostly not propagated by mainstream media. Social media offers potential platform for information, entertainment, opinion, education, expressions. entrepreneurship and mobilization. It pivots effective escalation of voices. Social media offers societal marginalization of gender inequality in terms of information, education, profession, awareness, etc. paving way for a change in the traditional roles of women. Moreover, this paper will discuss how social media became powerful platform for the discussion of women's rights and encouraging government and policy makers to step up commitments and formulate policies for gender equality. Through social media campaigns, women become aware about their rights and powers in the society. The positive role of Social Media has enhanced the pace of development and time. Thus, the present paper will be an attempt to explore the role of Social Media in Women Empowerment in the light of various research studies.

Key words : Social Media, Internet, Awareness, Women Empowerment, Social Networking.

Introduction

Social media is a combination of two words such as Social and Media. Social means interacting and communicating information with other people and receiving the feedback and information from them and Media means the vehicle, channel or instrument to disseminate or circulate the information such as TV, newspaper, radio etc. It is an umbrella term for electronic

communication in real time. It provides an electronic platform to create, communicate, share, discuss and exchange the information, opinions, thoughts, ideas, experiences, insights and perspectives through different application in real time to the users. It is computer-based and internet-based technology which enabled the virtual interaction and facilitates the dissemination of thoughts, information, entertainment and ideas for personal and professional communities. It is used to interact and communicate with friends, family and widely used in business world as it provides quick and instant communication and feedback. The users are prosumers who create, produce and consumes the content which includes information, audio-visual, photos, documents etc through various web-based software or application. It is a web based platform where users can connect and share the content which engaging, entertaining and informative for the local or global communities. It is an ever-changing and ever-evolving virtual world.

Objectives

1. To explore how social media shapes women's self-identity and self-perception.
2. To analyze the positive and negative impacts of online platforms on women's empowerment.
3. To discuss ways to promote authentic representation and digital empowerment for women.

Methodology

This seminar paper is based on which are collected from books, research Secondary data websites, political reports and articles other publised materials related to this topic.

Discussion

Social media has revolutionized women's empowerment by providing platforms for activism (#MeToo, #TimesUp), fostering community, and driving economic opportunities through digital entrepreneurship. While offering tools to challenge patriarchal stereotypes and amplify marginalized voices, it also presents risks like cyberbullying and the need for improved digital literacy.

Dimensions of Empowerment :

We can think of all these dimensions of empowerment from an economic perspective, but it is important to keep in mind that women's social empowerment and economic empowerment are very much intertwined. A central question that continues to consume scholars, policymakers, and public and private institutions is whether digital technologies and the opportunities in the digital economy can contribute to improving women's empowerment, including the dimensions identified in the three definitions above: participating in and benefiting from growth processes; access to critical development enablers; access to resources for self-empowerment; and the dismantling of structures that impede women's self-determination.

The "Double-Edged Sword" : Challenges to Identity

While empowering, social media introduces significant risks to female identity: Social

Comparison & Body Image: Constant exposure to "filtered realities" can lead to "appearance anxiety" and lower self-esteem. **The Surveillance Trap:** Women often engage in "self-monitoring" to avoid social backlash or "trolling," which can stifle authentic self-expression.

Digital Violence : Cyberbullying and gender-based online harassment disproportionately target vocal women, often aiming to push them out of public discourse.

Intersectionality in the Digital Space :

The experience of social media is not uniform. Women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women from the Global South face unique challenges. For these groups, social media is often the only platform where they can bypass mainstream media biases to build communities and reclaim their specific cultural identities.

Connectivity

Being reachable and able to reach others is essential for economic participation, especially in the digital age. Mobile technologies, in particular, have enhanced women's connectivity, especially in developing countries, so that they can keep in touch with business clients, suppliers, and employees, for example. In the face of domestic responsibilities, and in some contexts, restricted mobility, the use of ICT has enabled women to escape isolation, maintain connection to the world outside the home, and reduce the power of social norms that restrict their movements beyond the home setting. Initiatives to make ICT more accessible and affordable, especially in rural areas (such as GSMA's Connected Women program), are making it possible for more and more women to get connected.

Skill Development

While digital skills are a prerequisite to some types of technology use, access to online training programs and information resources has also enabled women to acquire the necessary digital skills to participate in the digital economy. Recognizing the importance of adequate digital skills, several governments, nonprofit organizations, and global partnerships have created programs to provide at least basic skills to women from different walks of life. For example, the EQUALS Global Partnership's Her Digital Skills program aims to provide free digital skill training and mentorship to 1 million women and girls by 2026. Furthermore, to improve the proportions of women working in the digital economy as producers and entrepreneurs, institutions are actively trying to encourage more women and girls to develop an interest in learning about and pursuing professions in STEM fields. An example is Women in STEM, a US-based organization that works with high schools to increase the proportion of girls studying STEM subjects.

Flexible Work

A particularly important benefit enabled by the digital economy is the opportunity for women to negotiate flexible work arrangements through which they can overcome barriers to their mobility, such as when domestic responsibilities or cultural norms restrict their movements outside the home. Assessments of the program indicated that its impacts extended beyond

the economic realm, and the ability to generate income and contribute to household finances was shown to have led to increased status, recognition of women's value and improved domestic gender dynamics . Today, platform work and the gig economy are providing employment opportunities to women all around the world, enabling them to earn an income, create new businesses or expand existing ones, reduce dependence on others for income support, and give them a measure of independence and the ability to pursue professional goals. Benefits experienced include income generation, access to new markets and customers, improved marketing and customer service, improved competitiveness, and increased sales.

Digital Divides

Gender-based gaps in digital access, skills, and leadership persist globally, and new divides are created with each new technological development. For example, data collated by the International Telecommunication Unions show that globally 48% of women use the internet compared to 55% of men. In Asia and the Pacific, 59% of men use the internet, compared to 54% of women. In the education system, women are less likely to study the subjects (such as engineering and mathematics) that are necessary for technical careers in the technology sector. And there are far fewer women than men in technology-sector jobs, especially top management and executive positions. These trends are repeating themselves with new technologies such as AI.

Gender-based Biases and Discrimination

Gender-based discrimination affects women's ability to work in the digital economy. Discrimination may be the result of human biases, such as stereotypes that women are not good leaders. Unwelcoming male-dominated work environments or unequal pay may discourage women from pursuing management positions. Stereotypes and misconceptions about women make it difficult for them to secure business capital. A number of studies have shown that women-owned or women-led companies receive only about 3% of venture capital, for instance. Generally, organizations recognize the value of digitalization for their operations, especially its ability to drive productivity, efficiency, and profitability. Less attention is paid to how productivity might be affected by who participates in business operations and how. However, estimates suggest that including women equally in the digital economy could boost the global economy by billions of dollars. Over the years, evidence has emerged that including women at high levels of business operations, at management and board levels, for example, leads to measurable improvements in company productivity and profitability compared to companies with few or no women in management and executive positions, with the performance difference being as much as 48%.

Biased Technology

Biases are also embedded into the creation and functioning of technologies. For example, in 2021, a study found that Facebook algorithms were showing women and men different ads

for jobs based on gendered assumptions about professions and industries. Similar observations have been made with processes at Amazon and Google. Only recently have companies started to address this and other sexist representations in their products, such as the fact that most virtual assistants are given female personalities.

Occupational Segregation and Feminized Jobs

Some of the occupational segregation seen in traditional work is also emerging in digital work. Men, for instance, are more likely to do gig work full-time while women usually do gig work on a part-time basis. Women also tend to work in certain sectors, such as food delivery, cleaning, and caring and not in others such as transport and other types of delivery services. For example, an analysis of data on Uber drivers in the USA between 2015 and 2017 found that women made up about 27% of Uber drivers. Customers also make gendered hiring choices, for example, selecting male gig workers for jobs like software development and females for jobs like typing. Additionally, new technologies are speeding up automation of jobs, and the sectors that are most vulnerable to automation (such as the textile, clothing, and footwear sector) happen to be highly feminized sectors. Thus, it is expected that women will suffer heavier job losses than men as companies move toward higher levels of automation. Although there is a lot to celebrate in the opportunities offered by the gig or platform economy, that type of employment remains highly insecure and does not provide economic stability, social protections, or benefits like sick leave or retirement plans. Digital technologies have contributed to decent work for some women but, in aggregate, they have not made a significant enough contribution to counteract the level of insecure and poorly compensated work that women tend to do.

Gender Pay Gaps

The benefits of access to the digital economy are often not equally enjoyed by men and women. For example, a recent study of digital platform workers in Africa showed that even among males and females with similar education and digital skills, male workers earned almost 4 dollars more than female workers. Similar gender pay gaps have been observed among Uber drivers in the USA, where research found a 7% gender pay gap. Some of the reasons for women earning less are that they drive more slowly and carefully, so make fewer trips, and they do not accept certain routes or driving at certain times of day because of concerns about safety. This demonstrates how social and structural constraints invisibly affect women's ability to gain similar benefits from the same technological opportunities as men.

Social Norms

Social and cultural norms impose expectations on women that can constrain their ability to explore their full economic potential. In some societies, women are not allowed to own technology devices or to open a bank account, meaning they are cut off from opportunities that require connectivity or from direct financial services. For example, one assessment of the Grameen Village Phone program found that, despite its initial success in promoting women's

digital entrepreneurship, there were indications that the majority of village phone accounts issued to women were being taken over by male family members. In addition, the unequal responsibility for unpaid domestic and care work restricts women's mobility both physically and professionally. When professionally successful, women also bear the double burden of work and domestic responsibilities, which can take a heavy physical and psychological toll. Even in countries with some of the most progressive national gender policies and programs, high levels of gender-based digital and social inequality persist. This is the case in Rwanda, which has stronger gender policies and digital infrastructure than most African countries but also has one of the highest gender digital gaps on the continent. It is also notable that efforts to mitigate the impact of social norms can backfire or lead to unintended consequences that defeat the original aims. For example, family-friendly policies such as maternity leave and part-time employment might enable women to balance their domestic and professional lives but can also result in women having mostly low-level, low-pay employment options available to them. Flexible and remote work options enabled by digitalization can have the perverse effect of making it appear that women can easily combine work and family care without support from their male counterparts.

Violence against Women and Girls

Women's access to digital technology brings with it the risks of online and technology-facilitated violence, which can discourage women from using technology personally or professionally or can make it an unpleasant and disempowering experience for them. Workplace harassment, whether online or offline, also harms women and makes workplaces and certain types of gig work (e.g., Uber driving) unsafe for them. Women gig workers, for example, are generally more likely than men gig workers to experience harassment and other forms of unwanted attention while working, but most platforms do not provide adequate systems to monitor and protect workers from harassment.

Findings :

Findings on Women's Identity Construction

Research suggests that identity in the digital age is no longer static; it is curated, performative, and fluid. **Self-Representation vs. Objectification:** Women use social media to bypass traditional media gatekeepers, presenting their own versions of "femininity." However, the "perfection economy" often leads to high levels of body dissatisfaction. A UNESCO report (2024) noted that 32% of teenage girls felt that Instagram made them feel worse about their bodies when they already felt insecure.

The Rise of "Digital Feminism": Platforms have allowed for the rise of intersectional identities. Women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds use digital tools to challenge dominant "white-centric" feminist narratives.

Algorithm-Driven Identities: AI algorithms often reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by pushing "trad-wife" content or narrow beauty standards, which can subtly influence younger

users' perceptions of what it means to be a woman.

Findings on Women's Empowerment

Empowerment through social media is categorized into three distinct dimensions:

Social/Political : Movements like #MeToo and #GlobalSisters use hashtags to turn personal trauma into collective political action, fostering global solidarity.

Economic : The "Creator Economy" has empowered women entrepreneurs. Social media lowers the barrier to entry for business, allowing women to achieve financial independence through digital marketing and e-commerce.

Psychological : Access to online "safe spaces" and support groups provides mental health resources and mentorship that may be unavailable in a user's immediate physical environment.

The "Double-Edged Sword": Challenges

Despite the progress, the digital age presents significant "digital roadblocks" to empowerment:

The Digital Gender Gap: In many regions, women still have less access to high-speed internet and digital literacy training compared to men.

Online Harassment: Cyber-violence, doxxing, and "trolling" are disproportionately directed at women who are vocal in the digital sphere, often leading to "digital silencing" where women withdraw from public discourse to protect their safety.

Gendered Labor: Much of the content creation that fuels social media platforms is "unpaid emotional labor" performed by women, which is then monetized by male-dominated tech corporations.

Recommendations

The digital age has undoubtedly granted women a global megaphone. While it has facilitated unprecedented economic and political gains, the commodification of identity remains a significant risk.

Recommendations for Future Policy:

Digital Literacy: Governments should implement programs specifically for women to navigate online safety and digital entrepreneurship.

Algorithmic Transparency: Social media companies must be held accountable for algorithms that promote harmful gender stereotypes or facilitate harassment.

Legal Frameworks: Strengthening laws against cyber-stalking and non-consensual image sharing to ensure the internet remains a safe space for female agency.

Conclusion

In sum, there are both encouraging signs that digital technologies and the digital economy are helping to improve women's empowerment and self-determination, and disappointing evidence that these technologies and systems do not fully remove the structures that reduce women's power. Social media is a transformative force that has provided women with unprecedented tools for agency and voice. However, true empowerment in the digital age

requires digital literacy to navigate the psychological pitfalls of social comparison and policy intervention to protect women from online violence.

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Human Trafficking: A Global Human Rights Crisis

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Abstract

Human trafficking is a grave violation of human rights and a growing global crisis affecting millions of people worldwide. It involves the recruitment, transportation, and exploitation of individuals through force, fraud, or coercion for purposes such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, child labour, domestic servitude, and organ trafficking. Women and children are particularly vulnerable due to poverty, lack of education, gender discrimination, armed conflict, and migration-related risks. Effective prevention, victim protection, rehabilitation, legal enforcement, and global cooperation are essential to combat this modern form of slavery and uphold human dignity.

Key words : Human, Trafficking, Global, Crisis, Women

Introduction

Human trafficking is one of the most serious human rights violations in the modern world. It is often called a hidden crime because it happens secretly and illegally. Millions of people across the world are trafficked every year for different forms of exploitation. This issue is not only a criminal problem but also a major global human rights crisis.

Discussion

Human trafficking is one of the most serious human rights violations in the modern world. It is often described as a hidden crime because it takes place in secret, away from public view. Every year, millions of men, women, and children are trafficked across borders and within their own countries. They are forced into situations of exploitation such as forced labour, sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, child labour, forced marriage, and even organ removal. Human trafficking is not only a criminal issue but also a global human rights crisis that affects the dignity, freedom, and safety of individuals worldwide.

At its core, human trafficking involves the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons through force, fraud, deception, or coercion for the purpose of exploitation. Victims are often lured with false promises of employment, education, or a better life. In many cases, they are threatened, abused, or manipulated into situations they cannot escape. Traffickers take advantage of vulnerable people who are struggling with poverty, unemployment, lack of education, discrimination, or political instability.

Women and children are the most affected groups. Many women and girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation, while boys and men are often forced into labour in industries such as agriculture, construction, mining, fishing, and domestic work. Children may be forced into

begging, child labour, armed conflict, or illegal activities. In some regions, trafficking is closely connected with migration, where people seeking better opportunities are deceived by agents or smugglers who later exploit them.

Poverty is one of the primary causes of human trafficking. When families lack basic necessities such as food, shelter, and education, they become easy targets for traffickers. Parents may unknowingly send their children with strangers who promise jobs or education in cities. In reality, these children are often subjected to harsh working conditions and abuse. Similarly, women seeking employment abroad may fall into the hands of traffickers who confiscate their passports and force them into exploitative labour or sexual work.

Lack of awareness and education also contributes to the problem. Many victims do not recognize the warning signs of trafficking. They may trust recruiters who offer attractive job opportunities without proper contracts or verification. In some communities, traditional practices such as child marriage or bonded labour create environments where exploitation becomes normalized. Social inequality and gender discrimination further increase the vulnerability of women and marginalized groups.

Armed conflicts, natural disasters, and political instability also increase the risk of trafficking. During times of crisis, people are displaced from their homes and separated from their families. Without protection and resources, they are more likely to fall prey to traffickers. Refugees and migrants are especially at risk because they often lack legal documentation and access to support systems.

The impact of human trafficking on victims is devastating. Physically, victims may suffer from injuries, malnutrition, and untreated illnesses. Psychologically, they experience trauma, fear, anxiety, depression, and loss of self-worth. Many survivors struggle to reintegrate into society due to stigma and lack of support. Children who are trafficked lose their childhood, education, and emotional development. The long-term consequences can affect victims for the rest of their lives.

Human trafficking also harms societies and economies. It weakens social structures, increases organized crime, and undermines the rule of law. Trafficking networks often operate alongside other criminal activities such as drug trafficking, money laundering, and corruption. Governments lose revenue, and communities suffer from increased insecurity and exploitation of labour. When human beings are treated as commodities, it erodes the moral foundation of society.

Recognizing the seriousness of this issue, the international community has taken steps to combat human trafficking. The United Nations adopted the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2000), also known as the Palermo Protocol. This protocol provides a clear definition of trafficking and encourages countries to criminalize it, protect victims, and promote cooperation across borders. Many countries have also enacted national laws to punish traffickers and provide assistance to survivors.

However, despite legal frameworks, enforcement remains a challenge. Trafficking networks are highly organized and operate across international borders. Corruption, lack of resources, and limited coordination between countries make it difficult to identify and prosecute offenders. In some cases, victims are wrongly treated as criminals, especially when they are forced into illegal activities. Protecting victims requires a sensitive and victim-centered approach that prioritizes their safety and rights.

Prevention is a key strategy in addressing human trafficking. Governments and organizations must focus on reducing vulnerability by improving access to education, employment, and social protection. Awareness campaigns can help people recognize suspicious job offers and recruitment practices. Strengthening border controls and labour regulations can also reduce exploitation. Community involvement plays an important role in identifying and reporting cases of trafficking.

Support for survivors is equally important. Victims need access to medical care, psychological counseling, legal assistance, safe shelter, and vocational training. Rehabilitation programs can help them rebuild their lives and regain independence. It is essential to ensure that survivors are treated with dignity and not blamed for the crimes committed against them. Technology has both positive and negative impacts on trafficking. On one hand, traffickers use social media and online platforms to recruit and exploit victims. On the other hand, technology can be used by law enforcement agencies to track criminal networks and identify victims. Digital awareness and cyber monitoring are becoming important tools in the fight against trafficking. Ending human trafficking requires global cooperation and strong commitment from governments, civil society, and individuals. It is not only the responsibility of law enforcement agencies but of society as a whole. Businesses must ensure ethical supply chains free from forced labour. Citizens must stay informed and report suspicious activities. Educational institutions must teach young people about their rights and the dangers of exploitation.

Human trafficking is a crime that strips individuals of their freedom, dignity, and basic human rights. It turns human beings into commodities for profit. As long as inequality, poverty, and discrimination exist, traffickers will continue to exploit the vulnerable. Therefore, addressing the root causes of trafficking is essential for creating lasting change.

Therefore, human trafficking is a global human rights crisis that demands urgent attention and action. It affects millions of lives and threatens the fundamental principles of justice and equality. Combating this crime requires prevention, protection, prosecution, and partnership at all levels. By working together and promoting human dignity, the world can move closer to eliminating human trafficking and ensuring a safer future for all.

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Cosmetic Consumption and The Life Influence of Beauty Industry on Women's Life- A Case Study with Special Reference to the Beauty Parlours of Moranhat, Assam

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Abstract

We are all accustomed to the poem "a wife" written by Sir Thomas Over-bury, stating that "all the carnal beauty of mine is skin deep". Meaning, external beauty does not equate with goodness or essential quality. What's more significant is the character of an individual. Hence, the statement is undeniable and certainly would be agreed by every individual. Cosmetic consumption is a cornerstone of modern society and is closely entwined with identity, self-expression, and social norms as it manifests over time. The beauty industry, a fast-growing worldwide industry, influences both women's image of themselves and their lives through daily routines. The industry sells us on advertising, social media, and endorsements from stars advertising models of beauty and perfectionist lifestyles; images of even unattainable bodies that emphasize flawless skin, youthfulness, and body perfection and the ideal beauty standard by the same standards. As a result of these ideals, women often buy multiple cosmetic products (from skincare to makeup) to match these social ideals. The role of cosmetic consumption is more than just looking at the front. For women, the association of the beauty products is confidence and empowerment, professionalism. Cosmetics can be considered self-care tools and creativity through which people can express themselves in a way that resonates with their sense of self. But this benefits the beauty standards at the same time that the pressure to not look or look like an unrealistic woman can become stressful because of high levels of dissatisfaction and low self-worth. This trend has been increased by digital platforms. In particular, social media has placed women in front of manufactured and edited images, perpetuating an unattainable beauty standard. With influencers and targeted marketing, self-expression gets increasingly eroded and consumerism replaced by a desire for the act of cosmetic consumption as something we need to do instead of something we do. It can thus cause women to feel a need to buy new products all the time to maintain fashion trends or social status. This way of using modern products is not just a source of jobs and creativity, but also a source of many sorts of economic and cultural benefits that produce jobs for people, and raises other concerns such as environmental sustainability issues, responsibility for business ethics

and sustainability and inclusivity.

Keywords : *Consumerism, Body image , beauty standards, self- perception.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Beauty

The notion of beauty is multifaceted as different societies across the world perceive the idea of beauty subjectively and have set some ideal beauty standards. It weaves through the fabric of human experience, shaping our perception and influencing our emotions. Beauty transcends mere aesthetics; throughout history beauty has been defined in myriad ways, often influenced by culture, society and individual taste. The Greek celebrated beauty in symmetry and proportion which they believed reflected a deeper truth about the universe. Beauty is not solely an external quality; it emerges from the interplay of perception and experience, where an object's or person's allure is shaped by context, meaning and the beholder's emotion. M Kara 2023 cited sense of beauty varies depending on different variables such as geographic region, tradition, religion, age, gender and socioeconomic status. Beauty is also regarded as the center of human kind which affects our lives both consciously and subconsciously. Today different cultures have various recognitions of beauty. Earlier the perception of beauty was homogeneous in nature but the concept of beauty has changed, particularly in recent years as a result of globalization, social media etc. Cosmetic surgeons and surgical techniques are impacted by the public's cosmopolitan makeup; new aesthetic perspectives are brought about by new perceptions of beauty. The historical ideals of beauty of India could be traced back at a glance over the ancient Indian figures, sculptures, paintings and statues of goddesses like Parvati. Unsurprisingly in contemporary Indian society the standards of beauty and it no more comprises traditional beauty standards. Dimitrov 2023 the power of beauty influences many aspects of modern society and daily life perceptions surrounding beauty date back to ancient philosophers and have evolved significantly throughout the history. Ideals of beauty have shifted and fluctuated over time, today the beauty standards have been narrowed down to Eurocentric beauty standards where light skin, prominent jaw line, cheek bones, large bushy eyes and rosy cheeks are admired. Beauty also equates with youthfulness where wrinkles and fine lines are never acknowledged in society. The media also plays an important role in the imposition of Eurocentric beauty standards. The appreciation and representation of Caucasian women and idealizing Caucasian facial features through advertisement and Bollywood songs are enough reasons behind internalization of Eurocentric beauty standards. The advertisements always centered on how to achieve Eurocentric beauty standards like fair skin, smooth skin. Films or series either in the Bollywood or Tollywood, portray the role of main character to be innocent, beautiful, modest and principled women with fair skinned whereas the villain with no ethics and violence is played by some men who are with dark skin. Lack of dark skin appreciation by mainstream media not only sets standards of beauty among the female audience but also drains their confidence and self-esteem when they are unable to meet them. The Indian mainstream media and film industries are dominated by

Eurocentric beauty standards and we the consumers are striving to fit in those beauty standards. Thus due to the existence of such beauty standards in India today demand for cosmetic products and grooming in beauty salons have crossed its ambit. It also led to a severe impact on women's lives.

1.2 Cosmetic Consumption

The term cosmetic refers to products and practices used to enhance or alter the appearance of the body, particularly the face, hair and nails. Cosmetics encompass a wide range of items that serve various aesthetic purposes such as makeup, skincare and hair care. The cosmetic industry has grown significantly over the years driven by changing beauty standards, technological advancements and cultural trends. Cosmetics can be of two types firstly the herbal and organic cosmetic product and the other is the synthetic cosmetic products. Both the types of products are used to alter the way people look or in a way enhance their appearance. AB Junaid 2013 focuses on the different marketing variable effect on female youth and their attitudes towards cosmetic where he observe that the mind of consumer is changing and they are moving towards the natural and herbal cosmetics products because they feel that these natural products can increase their physical appearance in a better way than that of cosmetic from synthetic origin. (Indian Cosmetic report 2023) The Indian cosmetic products market size is estimated at \$1.5 billion in 2023 and it is projected to reach \$2.7 billion by 2028. The cosmetic and beauty products and their expanding market are stimulating the socially constructed beauty industry. As per (WHO) World Health Organization, marketing industry forecasters especially those in Asia and Africa project that the skin whitening sector would have a valuation of approximately US \$31.2 billion by 2024. Cosmetic products are defined as "any substance or preparation intended to be placed in contact with the external parts of human body or with the teeth and the mucous Membranes of the oral cavity with a view exclusively or mainly for cleaning them, perfuming them, changing their appearance and/ protecting or keeping them in good condition" (EU Regulation 1223/2009, Article 2.1.a.) The cosmetic and beauty product market foment the already existing social construction of femininity deeper. It started in 1915, when the Gillette company launched its first ever women razor to capitalize the socially constructed beauty standard of hairless women. Other cosmetic products like foundation, bb or cc cream, contouring palettes and are used to create sharp and defined cheekbones, jawlines. On the other hand blusher is applied to have rosy cheeks.

1.3 Beauty Parlours

A beauty parlour is a haven dedicated to beauty treatments, personal grooming and relaxation. It offers an array of services including haircuts, hairstyling, manicure, pedicure, facials, waxing and makeup application and each service is designed to help individuals look and feel their best. The services provided by this institution are wide ranged from hair cutting, styling, dyeing, skin facial, manicure, pedicure, threading and waxing etc. Visiting beauty parlours have become a new obsession for Indian women in recent times as the urge to look beautiful amongst women has been increasing and the grooming services the beauty parlour

provides revolve around the Eurocentric beauty standards. Thus the beauty parlour has succeeded in capitalizing from the insecurities of Indian women who do not fit into socially constructed beauty standards. The makeover done is more inclined towards getting women a Eurocentric look.

1.4 Influence of Beauty Industry

The influence of the beauty industry on women's lives is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses cultural, social, psychological, and economic dimensions. The beauty industry shapes women's lives, including the cultivation of self-identity, the reinforcement of societal standards, economic implications, and the evolving discussions around body positivity and diversity. To understand the current influence of the beauty industry, it's essential to consider its historical development. Beauty standards have varied widely throughout history and across cultures, often reflecting broader societal changes. Ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians, placed significant importance on beauty rituals, with elaborate practices involving cosmetics, hairstyles, and adornments. Fast forward to the 19th and 20th centuries, the beauty industry began to take a more commercialized form, with the introduction of mass-produced beauty products and advertising geared towards women.

One of the most profound influences of the beauty industry is its role in establishing cultural standards for beauty. These standards are often narrow and can lead to feelings of inadequacy among women who do not conform to them. Media representation, including magazines, television, and social media, plays a crucial role in perpetuating these ideals. The prevalence of images showcasing specific body types, skin tones, and facial features can lead to a homogenized view of beauty that marginalizes those who do not fit these categories. By creating advertisement with unrealistic images of beauty, it has resulted in anxiety, low self esteem and low self confidence in many women (AM Britton) 2012.

The rise of social media has only intensified these pressures. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok are flooded with influencers who often promote curated images that reflect a narrow definition of beauty. The constant exposure to these images can create a sense of competition among women, driving them to invest heavily in cosmetics, skincare, and aesthetic procedures to achieve the "ideal" look. This can result in a cycle of overconsumption and dissatisfaction, as the beauty industry continually evolves to introduce new trends and products to chase. The beauty industry significantly impacts how women perceive themselves and their self-worth. For many, beauty products serve as a form of self-expression and empowerment. The act of applying makeup, for instance, can become a ritual that boosts confidence, allowing women to present themselves to the world in a way that feels authentic to them. This connection between beauty and identity is deeply ingrained; for some women, beauty becomes intertwined with their sense of self. The consumer behavior of women while purchasing cosmetics is substantially different that of other gender, primarily men (N Lalal) 2022

When beauty standards are unrealistic, women may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression when they feel they do not measure up. The pressure to conform to these ideals can lead to significant mental health issues, including body dysmorphia and eating disorders. The beauty industry bears responsibility for this pressure, often prioritizing profit over the well-being of consumers by promoting unachievable standards of beauty. The beauty industry is a colossal economic force. Globally, it generates billions of dollars each year, driving innovation and the creation of numerous jobs. Women play a pivotal role in this economic engine as consumers, often spending substantial portions of their income on beauty products and services. This spending is not merely a reflection of personal choice but often influenced by societal pressures and the desire to conform to beauty standards. The beauty industry also leaves positive influence as it provides economic opportunities for women. Many beauty professionals, including makeup artists, hairstylists, and beauty entrepreneurs, are women. These roles can offer financial independence and the chance to create their own brands. The rise of female entrepreneurs in the beauty space has led to a diversification of products and narratives, contributing to greater representation within the industry.

Technology continues to transform the beauty industry by providing women with access to a plethora of products and information. Online beauty tutorials, virtual try-on tools, and innovative skincare technologies enable women to experiment with their looks from the comfort of their own homes. The beauty industry simultaneously empowers and objectifies women. On one hand, beauty products can enhance self-expression and foster a sense of control over one's appearance. On the other hand, the industry can perpetuate objectification, reducing women to their physical appearance and promoting the idea that their worth is tied to their looks.

The beauty industry undeniably influences women's lives in myriad ways, shaping self identity, cultural standards, economic opportunities, and social dynamics. While it offers avenues for self-expression and empowerment, it also imposes unrealistic expectations and pressures that can impact mental health and self-esteem. The industry is at a crossroads; with growing movements toward body positivity and diversity, there is potential for meaningful change that fosters inclusivity and authenticity.

Significance of the Study

The study of cosmetic consumption and the beauty industry's influence on women's lives is a significant topic that encompasses a variety of disciplines. This exploration is essential for understanding the intricate dynamics of self-identity, societal expectations, consumer behavior, and the broader implications of beauty standards in contemporary society. The beauty industry has experienced exponential growth over the last few decades, evolving from traditional beauty practices to a multi-billion-dollar global sector, and the rise of this industry is influenced by several factors, including globalization, social media, and shifts in cultural attitudes toward beauty and femininity. Contemporary beauty standards perpetuated by media

representation and advertising, can have a profound impact on women's self-perception and social interactions.

Cosmetic consumption is often seen as a form of personal expression. Women use cosmetics not just to enhance their appearance but also to convey aspects of their identity. For many women, makeup can represent empowerment, creativity, and autonomy. For many women, cosmetics are not merely a tool for vanity but rather an essential element of self-expression. Different makeup styles can reflect personal moods, cultural backgrounds, or social affiliations. The media plays a crucial role in shaping beauty ideals and influencing cosmetic consumption. The portrayal of women in advertisements, television, and social media platforms often presents narrow definitions of beauty that can create unrealistic expectations. The rise of social media influencers has changed the game for beauty marketing, as consumers increasingly turn to platforms like Instagram and TikTok for beauty trends and makeup tutorials.

Social media has both positive and negative effects on women's perceptions of beauty. It enables diverse representations of beauty and helps promote body positivity and it also fuels comparison culture. Many women find themselves inundated with images of seemingly flawless individuals, leading to feelings of inadequacy and low self-esteem. The pressure to conform to these standards can drive increased consumption of cosmetic products in attempts to achieve an idealized look. The economic significance of cosmetic consumption cannot be overstated. The beauty industry creates jobs, drives product innovation, and contributes significantly to the global economy. Women are often targeted as primary consumers, with extensive marketing strategies aimed at catering to their beauty needs.

Understanding consumer behavior in the context of cosmetic consumption reveals how women engage with beauty brands. Women often develop brand loyalty based on emotional connections and perceived authenticity. Social media endorsements and influencer partnerships can significantly affect purchasing decisions, highlighting the importance of reliability and trust in an industry's marketing strategies. The influence of beauty industry standards has profound psychological implications for women and there is also a strong correlation between exposure to idealized beauty images and negative body image. The pressure to conform to societal beauty standards can lead to issues such as anxiety, depression, and eating disorders. The prevalence of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, along with conditions like body dysmorphic disorder, can be partially attributed to the impact of unrealistic beauty standards perpetuated by the beauty industry. The study of cosmetic consumption and the beauty industry's influence on women's lives encompasses critical cultural, economic, and psychological dimensions.

Statement of the Problem

The beauty industry is a multi-billion dollar global market that has a profound impact on societal perceptions of beauty, self-esteem, and identity, particularly for women. The pervasive

nature of advertising, social media, and celebrity culture fosters a culture of cosmetic consumption that not only promotes certain standards of beauty but also affects women's mental health, self-image, and everyday life. This problem encompasses several dimensions, including societal pressures for beauty conformity, the psychological impacts of cosmetic consumption, and the implications of these consumption patterns for women's autonomy and self-worth. The societal pressures surrounding physical appearance are deeply embedded within cultural narratives perpetuated by the beauty industry. Advertisements and media portrayals often uphold narrow definitions of beauty, emphasizing youthfulness, slimness, and specific facial features. Women are often positioned in a dilemma where their value and acceptance are tied to their adherence to these beauty standards. This creates an environment in which the pursuit of beauty becomes heavily commercialized. Women may feel compelled to invest in an array of cosmetic products like foundations, lipsticks, contour kits, hair products, in order to conform to these societal expectations.

Moreover, the pressure to conform to beauty standards can exacerbate issues such as anxiety and depression. Women may develop unrealistic body image expectations and internalize the idea that their worth is contingent on their appearance. The psychological ramifications of cosmetic consumption are significant and multifaceted. Research indicates that the relentless pursuit of beauty, fueled by industry standards, can lead to body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and negative mental health outcomes among women. The influence of the beauty industry extends beyond superficial consumption; it can deeply affect women's autonomy and sense of self-worth. The industry promotes the idea that beauty is synonymous with value and success, leading women to believe that their appearance directly affects their social and professional opportunities. Many women perceive that conforming to beauty standards will enhance their chances of being accepted or loved. This can create a precarious relationship with cosmetic consumption, where women may feel that their choices are not genuinely their own, but rather dictated by external societal pressures.

The economic implications of cosmetic consumption cannot be overlooked. The beauty industry cultivates a culture of excessive spending across various demographics, pushing women to prioritize spending on cosmetics over other essential areas of their lives. This consumer culture often preys on the vulnerabilities of women, compelling them to invest in products that promise to transform their appearance and boost self-esteem. Issues of financial exploitation arise when women feel pressure to keep up with trends and purchase the latest products, often resulting in overspending and accumulating debt. This economic burden can further contribute to the psychological stress associated with beauty standards, leading to feelings of guilt or regret over financial decisions linked to the desire for societal acceptance.

The problem of cosmetic consumption and the influence of the beauty industry on women's lives is a complex socio-cultural issue that intersects with psychological, economic, and existential dimensions. The pervasive societal pressures surrounding beauty ideals

profoundly affect women's self-esteem, autonomy, and mental health, creating a cycle of consumption that is difficult to escape.

2 Literature Review

The purpose of this research is to study the cosmetic consumption and the influence of the beauty industry on women's life. While conducting this sociological study, the emphasis of the study will be on the consumer culture in terms of cosmetics products and the beauty industry influence on women's life and my focus will be on to ascertain how different women perceive the idea of beauty. In the literature review, I have thoroughly been dependent on secondary materials such as articles and journals. This section highlights the reviews already done by the previous researchers in the related area of the present research study.

2.1 International Review

CF Babcock in his article "The significance of facial beauty" highlighted that when we are to discern beauty in music we often look for harmony in the music and the proper balance of the scale. Similarly when we discern beauty in a person's face, it's all about the good features and most significantly the balance of those features. All the features of the face must be delineated in such a way that even during facial movements like masticating food or expressing emotions, the contour of the face must appear beautiful.

Britton, Ann Marie. (2012) in his article "The beauty industry's influence on women in society" stated that the cosmetic industry has a significant impact on college women today. As the goal of the study is to gather data regarding the usage of cosmetics, habits and beliefs in college students, 45 questions about cosmetic usage, behavior and personal habit were asked in this survey through a snowball sampling method.

T Makwana in his article "factors influencing female buying behavior for cosmetic products" stated about the influence of consumer behavior since consumer control market and it is essential for all organizations to understand their purchasing habits in order to satisfy them. He is of the opinion that according to Kotler, Keller, Koshy, Jha. Consumer behavior is affected by different factors such as cultural, social, personal and psychological factors and with the help of information received after studying various factors the effect of price and promotion. According to his findings women's fashion consciousness is growing daily and cosmetics have become a crucial component of their fashion statement.

The article "colourism and politics of beauty" by Alisha Phoenix (2014) throws a light on ongoing trend of how the derogatory comments and various jokes intended towards dark skin girls all over social media, comments and tweets like "dark is beautiful" and "not all light skin girls are attractive" are also very popular and favored in the contemporary times. However, the emphasis seems to be on the attempt to nullify the ideology of dark skin as ugly and light skin as attractive, rather the priority must be on negating the shades of skin as a criteria of beauty and attractiveness. Tweets based on prejudices of skin color, for instance, light skin girls are hard for young men to attain, when merged with sexism disempowers women of

color.

Due to intersection of racism, colourism and patriarchal pattern of preference for more than a decade into the twenty first century has led to establishment of a hegemonic ideal standard of beauty where white women remain powerful and beautiful. Racism and colourism leads to privileging light skin over dark and helps the patriarchal desires thrive in society. Women with dark skin remain at a disadvantage in the education sector, job and marriage markets because skin shades are deemed to be criteria of beauty assessment. Today the technology perpetuates colourism through cosmetic surgeries and skin bleaching to transform non-European looking into more like white and European. Magazines comprising publicity photos are digitally altered and lighting while photo shoots are used in such a way that a woman of color appears to be many shades lighter than her actual skin tone. Thus it clearly demonstrates that women of colour are not desirable and beautiful to be displayed in the front page of the magazine until and unless their skin tones are altered into lighter ones.

A sociological study on "Performing Beauty: Dove's Real Beauty Campaign" by Jennifer Millard, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon highlighted upon the 2024, Dove's real beauty campaign which came up with a powerful short video "onslaught" with tagline "talk to your daughter before beauty industry does". The video comprises cosmetic surgeries, diets, and thinner bodies transformation of skin, everything which the beauty industry imposes upon women's bodies. The short video was an attempt of the company to rebrand itself by redefining the beauty standards and to regenerate the self esteem of women. But the question here is what does the video mean to the audience, especially to the women? How do they feel about the Dove's portrayal of real beauty? Since the ideals of beauty are subjective and different individuals perceive differently about the definition of real beauty, the advertisements play a crucial role in defining and altering people's perceptions on beauty standards. The repercussions of beauty advertisements on beauty standards lead to negative body image, anxiety and low self esteem.

Dove's attack on beauty stereotypes has gained quite an attention but it's been under scrutiny and criticism due to its parent company Unilever as Axe Cologne who advertises controversial contents. Dove was also being called hypocritical on this because it also challenges and downplays the idea of skin whitening and slim bodies. From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, beauty is an expression of embodiment; it is not intrinsic but a result of construct. Despite the truth that some people are born beautiful but more or less it is some social and cultural consensus that determines what makes a person beautiful or decides some forms of beauty that are universal. Whereas, Dove's real beauty campaign aims at a variety of realism within advertising premises. The perspective of dramaturgy is also well suited in studying beauty standards because appearances play an important role for impression management and performances. Representation of individuals as beautiful people in mainstream advertising or dominant cultural industries might compel audiences to try out certain diets or use cosmetic

products to meet the showcased standard of beauty. Dove challenges such portrayal of dominant beauty script by ameliorating its content, adding more countercultural and diverse images. Dove is trying its best to redefine beauty by altering beauty related semiotic resources. Dove real beauty advertisements are evident of redefining and transforming the definition of beauty. The advertisements are making splendid marks by showcasing regular looking women with little or no makeup at all, encouraging women of all shapes and sizes to embrace their appearances.

An article by Laura Hurd Clarke on "Women, ageing and beauty culture: navigating the social perils of looking old" reveals that women's appearances are of immense significance, women with attractive appearance possess more possibility to receive greater affection from the desirable male partner. But with the social construction of beauty, women in older age come into a situation of disadvantage. It is believed that beauty is synonymous with youthfulness and disparagement of looking old. Wrinkles and blemishes are not considered as epitome of loveliness and lauded accomplishment. Since our society equates beauty with youthfulness, it is evident that older women would be perceived as less attractive than younger ones.

It is evident from the demand and production of anti-ageing cream, diets, medications etc. that aging is highly discouraged and looked down on. Ageism is evident in cultural discourse, institutionalized policies and everyday interactions. Ageing in the life of every woman remains a discontent since it depletes the self-esteem of women. Loss of physical attractiveness along with wellbeing of health leads to discontent amongst older women. Other than emphasizing on physical appearance, an older woman also expresses their discontent by pointing out the difference they feel internally and externally. Some women perceive their subjective younger identities more strongly over their chronological age. Adoption of a younger sense of identity is a strategy for women to presume themselves as an "ageless self". Ageism is not only confined to women's personal experiences but it also has social and financial repercussions.

In the book "The Beauty Myth" by Naomi Wolf, (1991) analyze how beauty becomes an obsession as modern women is caught in a never ending cycle of hopelessness, self consciousness and self-loathing as she strives to live up to society's unattainable ideal of "the flawless beauty". She also speaks about the relentless, insidious ideals of beauty that are used to undermine women. These ideals of beauty - thin, fair, young, delicate are taught to women every day in myriad ways, which makes it even harder to spot where they truly stem from.

Through her book, Wolf systematically highlights the effects of beauty myths in numerous spheres of one's life- work, sex, religion, hunger and violence.

2.2 National Review

In an article named "Fair and Lovely: Standards of beauty, Globalization and Modern Indian Women", by Rebeca Gelles, highlights how Globalized media influences the perception of viewers on beauty standards. She writes about how the advertisement corporations that

are foreign in origin have led Indian beauty standards inclined towards western styles. In contemporary times, standard of beauty in India is being narrowing down to Eurocentric beauty standard and women in India today have the urge to measure themselves against the international standards and women in India today have the urge to measure themselves against the international standards of beauty which in turn leading to flushing of cosmetic markets and industries in India. Indian women after burgeoning globalized and westernized advertisement corporations are amplifying their efforts to fit in Eurocentric beauty standards. India has a prolonged historical background with so many invaders and rulers from different parts of the globe and to understand the historical context of Indian beauty standards. It is because the beauty standard seems to vary from time to time under the reign of different rulers. If we trace back to the Mauryan period, Fourth to Second century BCE, Women with narrow legs, wide hips were considered as desirable. Under the reign of Kushan that is during the first to fourth century "s" shaped body size gained the status of ideal body type. While analyzing the traditional Indian beauty standards it's instructive to have a glance at goddess Parvati who is an epitome of beauty in ancient art.

But Modern Indian women derive their perception on beauty ideals based on what they see in television advertisements, Bollywood movies, songs, magazines and so on. For modern Indian women possessing clear and fair skin is no less than a recipe for success. From Matrimonial sites to professional careers in fashion industries, fair skin women have always had an upper hand. There are multiple Indian advertisements that focus on how dark skinned girls can lighten up their skin tone, making it seem as if being dark skin is a flaw that needs to be fixed. Such advertisements are unsolicited and immoral since it promotes colourism in society. Secondly most of the Indians have hair which is black in colour but recently the dying of grey hair is largely burgeoning. Asserting on the texture of hair, hair straightening have acquired a wide currency amongst young ladies lately. The demand for it has been booming due to mainstream media's influences on consumers.

A study conducted by Abdullah Bin Junaid, Reshma Nasreen Faheem Ahmed of Jamia Hamdard, New Delhi, on "Purchase Behavior and cosmetic consumption Pattern among young Females in Delhi and NCR" reveals that consumers in contemporary society are now inclining towards the application of natural and herbal cosmetic products. Many consumers believe that herbal and organic cosmetics products have least side effect than that of synthetic one. Women who were interviewed reveal that they want to use more herbal and organic products to enhance their look without causing any harm to their skin. The reason behind the burgeoning demand for cosmetic products is due to the fact that women are increasingly joining the workforce today and hence their income is rising. They are using their income to maintain a decent and luxurious lifestyle.

AD Khan and MN Alam in their work "Cosmetics and their associated adverse effects" highlights the historical backdrop of cosmetics and beauty products and the toxicities these

cosmetics comprises. The origin of cosmetics dates back to 1500 AD, during the times of Indus valley civilization. A paste was prepared to cure cracked lips. This is how the cosmetics application gained wide currency since time immemorial. But in contemporary era, where economics are tremendously globalized and steered with capitalistic intentions, the composition of the cosmetic products have altered, they are more processed than naturally obtained. The cosmetic products contain harmful chemical toxins other than organic substances. Hydroquinone, a chemical substance found in fairness and skin lightening cream, has harmful adverse impacts. It is responsible for developing ochronosis. Ochronosis is a skin condition that causes black-blue skin pigmentation where the hydroquinone is applied for a long period of time. Ochronosis is also responsible for losing elasticity of the skin. BHA (butylated hydroxyl toluene) is a synthetic chemical commonly found in moisturizers and lipsticks. BHA and BHT are responsible for causing skin allergies. BHA is declared as a carcinogen by the international agency for research on cancer. Another synthetic chemical used in 80% of the cosmetic products are parabens. Parabens easily perfuse into the skin and cause hormonal disruptions. It is also found out that excessive use of mythylparabens damages the DNA and prompts skin raging. Calcium is also categorized by the United States Department of Health and Human Service. Cadmium is highly found in body cream. Another chemical substance, called lead which is also a carcinogen can be found in pigmented cosmetic products like lipstick.

Synthetic chemicals like mercury are excessively used in the skin lightening and fairness cream and soaps. The beauty products for skin whitening found in Asian and African markets contain high quantities of mercury. Mercury is a kind of salt that surpasses the Melanin formation by skin cells and hence the skin appears light and fair. Mercury application in the skin increases the risk of skin rashes, discolouration and decreases the resistance of skin cells to fight bacterial and fungal infections.

3 Objectives of the Study

- To examine the influence of the beauty industry on women's life.
- To analyze the social construction of beauty standards.
- To explore the consumption pattern of cosmetic products.

3.1 Research Questions

- How are women influenced by the beauty industry?
- How is beauty socially constructed?

What kind of grooming services and cosmetics are trendy and high in demand?

5. Field and Methodology

This study comprises various research methods and techniques incorporated by researchers to conduct this study.

5.1 Area of the study : This study is conducted among the parlours in the area of the Moranhat, Dibrugarh District. The research was conducted in 5 beauty saloons of Moranhat

and 4 residential areas named Peolinagar, Jyotipur, Lachit Ngar and Ushapur. The data is collected from 50 respondents through an in-depth interview method. The Napit Salon, Blossom Beauty salon, Kumkum beauty parlour, Moon beauty parlour is located in the lane of Moranhat Town.

5.2 Research design : For the present study qualitative and mix method approach combining exploratory and descriptive research design is used to gain both insight and measurement.

5.3 Sampling method : This study adopts a convenient and purposive sampling method. A convenient sampling method is used as an increasing number of customers visiting beauty salons is convenient to interview more and more respondents. Purposive sampling method is used as it allows to target specific demographics such as daily makeup users or professionals who possess deep, specialized knowledge of product.

5.4 Tools of data collection : Both Primary and secondary data serve as the foundation of this research.

Primary data : This study collects primary data through an in-depth interview method among the 50 respondents which is conducted among the Parlours and the residential areas of Moranhat.

Secondary data : The sources of secondary data encompasses books, journals, gazettes, newspapers and various articles.

5. Results and Discussions

Societal Nation of Beauty

The social construction of beauty is a complex phenomenon that has a profound impact on women's lives, particularly in relation to cosmetic consumption and the influence of the beauty industry. This concept refers to the idea that beauty is not an inherent or objective quality, but rather a social construct shaped by cultural norms, historical contexts, and media representations. The social construction of beauty implies that societal standards of what is considered beautiful can vary drastically across cultures, time periods, and social groups.

These standards are created and reinforced through social interactions, media portrayals, and cultural practices. From the slim figures idolized in Western media to the fuller figures celebrated in other cultures, beauty ideals are fluid and contextual. This constructed nature of beauty can lead to significant implications for women, particularly in how they perceive themselves and the lengths they will go to conform to these often-changing standards. The beauty industry capitalizes on these ideals, often portraying them in narrow and unrealistic ways. As a result, women can feel pressured to conform to these societal expectations, leading to increased rates of cosmetic consumption and other beauty-related practices.

The media serves as a primary vehicle for the dissemination of beauty ideals. Through advertising, television, films, and social media, women are constantly bombarded with images and messages that dictate what beauty should look like. These portrayals often emphasize unattainable physical attributes, such as flawless skin, a slim physique, and specific facial

features; cosmetic consumption plays a vital role in the daily lives of many women. The act of using cosmetics can be both a form of self-expression and a response to societal pressures. The social construction of beauty and its influence on cosmetic consumption can have significant psychological effects on women. Constant exposure to idealized images can contribute to negative body image and self-esteem issues. Women may internalize unattainable beauty standards, leading to dissatisfaction with their bodies and a desire to change their appearance through cosmetics or surgical interventions.

The influence of social media can enhance feelings of comparison and competition among women. With curated and filtered images, it becomes easy to fall into the trap of comparison, where women measure their worth against others' seemingly perfect lives and appearances. This can foster an environment of self-criticism and anxiety, as women may feel they do not measure up to societal ideals. The mental health implications of these pressures can be severe.

The social construction of beauty plays a significant role in shaping women's lives, influencing cosmetic consumption patterns and psychological well-being. As media representations of beauty continue to evolve, it is critically important to foster an environment that encourages diversity, authenticity, and self-acceptance. By challenging narrow beauty standards and embracing a broader definition of beauty, society can help women reclaim their bodies and their identities, leading to healthier and more empowered lives. Ultimately, beauty should not be defined by societal constructs but celebrated in all its diverse forms, allowing individuals the freedom to express their unique selves without the constraints of imposed ideals.

The Influence of Beauty Industry

Cosmetic consumption has become a significant aspect of women's lives, with the beauty industry exerting a profound influence on their perceptions, self-esteem, and social interactions. In today's society, where beauty standards are often highlighted in media, advertising, and social platforms, the way women perceive themselves and their roles can be highly affected by the ideals promoted by the beauty industry.

Firstly, the beauty industry, with its vast array of products from skincare to makeup promises not just aesthetic enhancement but also empowerment. Companies often market cosmetics as tools for self-expression and confidence-building. This narrative can lead women to invest substantially in beauty products, believing that these items will help them achieve societal notions of attractiveness. The persuasive power of advertising campaigns and social media influencers who showcase their routines and transformations can create a desire for consumption that feels almost obligatory for many women. However, the influence of the beauty industry goes far beyond mere aesthetics. It often perpetuates fixed beauty standards that are frequently unattainable. With the rise of digital marketing and image manipulation, these standards can distort reality, leading women to internalize ideals that may contribute to body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and low self-esteem. This is particularly concerning in an era where mental health awareness is gaining traction; the pressure to conform to these standards

can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and lead to a negative self-image. Culturally, the influence of the beauty industry also varies. For instance, in some cultures, specific traits are emphasized—such as fair skin or certain body shapes—leading to a market for products that reinforce these ideals. This can result in not only a homogenization of beauty but also cultural appropriation, where products and practices from various cultures are commodified to fit mainstream beauty narratives.

Despite the challenges posed by the beauty industry's influence, there is a growing movement towards body positivity and inclusivity. Many brands are now recognizing the importance of diverse representations of beauty. This shift encourages a broader acceptance of different skin tones, body types, and personal styles. Women are increasingly empowered to embrace their uniqueness and challenge conventional standards, promoting a more authentic approach to beauty that focuses on individuality rather than conformity. In conclusion, while cosmetic consumption can enhance self-expression and confidence for many women, it is essential to critically assess the pervasive influence of the beauty industry on societal norms and personal well-being. Acknowledging the complexities of these influences can empower women to make informed choices about their beauty practices and foster a culture that values authenticity over unattainable ideals. By promoting inclusivity and celebrating diversity, society can help reshape the narrative around beauty, leading to healthier perceptions of self worth and identity.

Cosmetic Consumption Pattern

Firstly out of 50 respondents 40 respondents are of age group between 20-45 have availed grooming services like pedicure and manicure in beauty saloons. According to them the reason behind undergoing such beauty practices is to maintain hygiene by removing dead skin cells. The pedicure and manicure not only make the hands and legs look clean and brighter but the entire procedure is rejuvenating and releases the stress. The respondents avail pedicure and manicure services for utmost pleasure.

Secondly remaining 10 respondents of the age group between 26-50 have availed facial treatments like gold facial. Diamond facial. Diamond and gold facials are available in order to attain glowing skin. Facial treatment also increases the elasticity of skin and restores youthful appearance to the skin, facial treatments involve massage techniques. Thus the entire facial treatment procedure is quite relaxing decompressing for the customers. On the other hand, threading is an age-old practice passed on to successive generations from their predecessors. Threading eyebrows is commonly practised. People with excessive and visible hair trends opt for facial hair removal.

Lastly 20 participants have availed at least any one or two of these mentioned hair treatments like straightening, smoothening, hair dyeing, hair spa treatment, keratin treatment.

7 Conclusion

Cosmetic consumption and the influence of the beauty industry profoundly shape women's lives in multifaceted ways. The beauty industry, driven by social constructs and amplified by

media portrayals, establishes and perpetuates narrow definitions of beauty that often prioritize unattainable ideals. This ongoing pressure encourages women to invest in cosmetic products as a means of conforming to societal expectations, which can lead to a complex relationship with self-image and identity. While cosmetic consumption can empower some women by providing a form of self-expression and creativity, it can simultaneously impose significant psychological burdens. Women may experience increased body dissatisfaction, anxiety, and self-esteem issues as they navigate relentless beauty standards perpetuated by advertising and social media. Furthermore, the economic implications of cosmetic consumption underscore the societal belief that beauty equates to worth, leading many to allocate substantial resources to attain perceived ideals. However, there is a growing movement toward redefining beauty standards, fostering inclusivity, and promoting self-acceptance. Initiatives that embrace diversity in representation, body positivity, and critical media literacy can challenge the prevailing narratives shaped by the beauty industry. By encouraging women to celebrate their unique identities and reject harmful societal norms, we can cultivate a more empowering and affirming relationship with beauty. Ultimately, the evolution of the beauty industry presents an opportunity to reshape perceptions of beauty and transform the ways in which women engage with cosmetic consumption. By fostering a culture that values authenticity, diversity, and self-acceptance, we can create an environment where women can thrive without the constraints of imposed ideals, leading to healthier self-expressions and a genuine appreciation for the diverse forms of beauty that exist in the world. On the other hand various research techniques will be used in order to conduct this research.

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What is it to be a Feminist ?

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Abstract

Over the years, the concept of Feminism has been misunderstood and many times the term has been used derogatorily to refer it as a concept created against men. It is very important to disregard the various misunderstandings of the term and the concept as well. One should analyze that Feminism is a theory that seeks equality among all genders and not a counter attack on men. Feminism's greatest enemy is patriarchy. It is a social system, created by the people and it is very crucial to dismantle patriarchy for greater benefits of the people. This article tries to differentiate what being a feminist mean and what it does not. It further deals with the concepts of patriarchy and pseudo-feminism which are very basic to understand the concept of Feminism.

Keywords : Feminist, Women, Patriarchy, Men, Gender

Objectives

1. To explore the concept of Feminism.
2. To examine patriarchy as a tool of oppression for all genders in society.
3. To analyze the concept of Pseudo-feminism.

Methodology

This article employs a secondary and descriptive research design, utilizing existing data from reputable sources to describe and analyze the research topic. Relevant academic journals, news articles, and reports are gathered to write the article.

What is not Feminism ?

Have you ever wondered what it takes to be a part of a special movement for fairness and equality? It turns out, being a feminist simply means to care about equality. Feminism, which is widely understood as a monolithic, gender-exclusive ideology, is in reality a dynamic, globally resonant movement dedicated to dismantling of interlocking systems of oppression. Historically, the definition of Feminism was rooted in the fundamental pursuit of legal and political equality between men and women (Flexner, 1975). However, as societal understanding has matured, so is the movement's core identity. To be a feminist in the 21st century is not simply to affirm that men and women are equal but to acknowledge that the system of patriarchy interacts with racism, classism and heteronormativity creating unique forms of injustice (Collins, 2000).

The history of feminism is often categorized into four main waves (Mohajan, 2022). The First wave (mid-19th to early 20th century) primarily centered on gaining suffrage(the

right to vote) and property rights for women, as was articulated in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. The Second wave (1960s-1980s) broadened the scope to address issues of equality in workplace and family, tackling cultural and political inequalities with the slogan, "Personal is Political," popularized by writers like Betty Friedman in *The Feminine Mystique*. The Third wave (1990s-2010s) emerged partly as a response to perceived failures or overlooks of the second wave, focusing on individuality, diversity and intersectionality. Finally, the Fourth wave feminism began around 2012 and is dealing with contemporary issues such as sexual abuse and harassment, intersectionality and the massive use of digital platforms to amplify feminist voices.

The contemporary feminist movement finds itself into a big misconception that its primary goal is the subjugation or marginalization of men. This narrative has been made popular by media and online discourse, paints feminism as rooted in misandry i.e., the hatred of men rather than its stated objectives which were political, economic and social equality of the sexes.

To understand why feminism is frequently branded as "anti-male," one must first acknowledge the nature of contemporary feminist action. Unlike the First wave's focus on suffrage or the Second wave's generalized pursuit of workplace equality, the Fourth wave is largely characterized by digital activism, a focus on systemic violence, and a demand for immediate accountability. Movements like #MeToo and campaigns against rape culture have brought discussions of sexual harassment, systemic sexism, and male dominance into the highly visible and confrontational public sphere of social media (Cochrane & Bussey-Chamberlain, 2024).

This visibility, while necessary for change, creates a Perception Paradox. For individuals, specially men who have historically enjoyed systemic, unexamined privilege under patriarchy, the structures that grant advantage are criticized, those who benefit from them often internalize the criticism as a personal attack. Scholar Amber Wardell (2024) notes that for men with fragile egos, "being held accountable feels like hostility," and the demand for liberation for women "feels like being shunned." This emotional reaction is then amplified into the political label of man-hater to delegitimize the entire movement, a strategy used by opponents of feminism for decades.

When feminists call out patriarchal practices such as unequal pay, the glass ceiling, or the lack of protection against street harassment, the critique inevitably lands on the male individuals and institutions upholding these structures. While the target is the structure of power, the emotional delivery in the heat of a social media discourse or political fight can sometimes be interpreted as an emotional condemnation of the male gender itself.

Patriarchy and its silent victim- Men

Feminism's true enemy is oppression, specifically the institutionalized oppression and bias found in misogyny. As Ayana Mukherjee (2024) argues, "feminism is not anti-men; it is

inherently anti-oppression." The movement campaigns for legal and reproductive rights, protection from violence, and equality in the workplace, all issues that challenge a status quo built by and for male dominance, but which are not attacks on men's inherent worth. When feminists criticize power, they are criticizing the hegemonic masculinity that is often associated with dominance, self-reliance, and competition, behaviors which serve to reinforce male supremacy (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The societal normalization of aggression, frequently summarized by the phrase "boys will be boys" to excuse hostile behavior, and normalizes violence as a tool of dominance. This forces men into a cycle where their emotional understanding is limited to anger and aggression. It is very crucial to understand that the system of patriarchy is as harmful to men as it is to women. Patriarchy defines men by their capacity to provide and protect, creating an immense, singular pressure to be the sole or primary "breadwinner." Patriarchal gender stereotypes dictate not only how men should behave, but what fields of work they are permitted to pursue without facing social condemnation. These stereotypes classify certain professions as inherently "feminine," discouraging men from entering them, despite personal interest or aptitude.

In the Indian context, the breadwinner role is amplified by the expectation of supporting the extended family, including aging parents, unmarried or unemployed siblings, and contributing to large, socially mandated expenses like weddings. Indian society places extreme pressure on men to follow high-status, high-income paths often limiting acceptable choices to Engineering, Medicine, or Civil Services. If a man expresses a preference for careers in the arts, social work, nursing, primary school teaching, or any non-lucrative creative field is often subject to intense familial disappointment and social ridicule by taunting them- "Who will marry you?" or "You won't be able to provide for your family."

Additionally, Patriarchy has become increasingly rigid in its identification of only two genders, a limitation that excludes and marginalizes those who do not conform to the male-female binary and can be seen as intertwined with capitalist social and economic structures. This view further creates even a bigger problem to the LGBTQ+ communities and their stands for creating inclusive spaces for all genders.

Pseudo-feminism

The feminist movement majorly advocates for equality of the sexes and the dismantling of oppressive patriarchal structures. However, a significant critique has emerged, often termed as pseudo-feminism, which suggests that certain strains of the movement have shifted from seeking gender equality to promoting antagonism, resulting in new forms of oppression against men (Neeraja, 2023). Pseudo-feminism exploits the moral authority of genuine feminist struggle to enforce double standards, dismiss male suffering, and, particularly in the Indian context, encourage the misuse of protective legislation.

One of the most powerful arguments for the perceived oppression of men under "pseudo-feminism" comes from the alleged misuse of gender-specific laws designed to protect women.

In India, several laws intended to combat historical patriarchal crimes are reportedly exploited for personal or financial gain, placing men and their families at severe legal and social risk. Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), which criminalizes cruelty by a husband or his relatives toward a wife, was enacted to prevent dowry-related abuse. However, legal reports and social groups dedicated to men's rights argue that this section has become weaponized. As a non-bailable, cognizable offense, an accusation often leads to the immediate arrest of the husband and his entire family, including elderly parents or distant relatives, without primary investigation (Sharma, 2019). The Supreme Court of India itself has referred to the law as being used as a "weapon rather than a shield," noting that its easy application has led to "legal terrorism" against innocent families (Sushil Kumar Sharma vs. Union of India, 2005). Similarly, the Domestic Violence Act has been criticized for being broad enough to be used against sisters, grandmothers, and other female relatives of the husband, subjecting them to civil harassment and legal maneuvering, thereby turning gender-specific protection into an alleged tool of gender-based harassment against men and their female relatives alike (National Men's Welfare Report, 2021).

Globally and in India, men have significantly higher suicide rates than women (World Health Organization Data, 2023). Advocates argue that this is partly a consequence of the patriarchal pressure to adhere to "toxic masculinity" (e.g., emotional suppression, financial burden). However, critics of pseudo-feminism argue that the dominant public discourse fails to treat the male mental health crisis with the same urgency as female issues. They contend that any attempt by men to discuss their unique mental health burdens, professional failure, or emotional distress is often met with the counter-argument that these are minor concerns compared to gender-based violence against women (Chakraborty, 2020). This creates a social vacuum where men's authentic experiences of pain are invalidated, trapping them in the very emotional stoicism that causes them harm.

Conclusion

This above analysis gives a detailed understanding of the three objectives of this research article. It is very significant to decode the true meaning of Feminism and related theories to the general masses so that it can never be acknowledged as anti-men. As Justin Musk says, "The enemy of feminism isn't men. Its patriarchy, and patriarchy is not men. It is a system, and women can support the system of patriarchy just as men can support the fight for gender equality." The common enemy is Patriarchy, a socially created system that should be completely dismantled and promote equality and justice in the society making it a safe and better place to live in.

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