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REASONS FOR LIVING IN OLD AGE HOME: A STUDY IN SELECTED OLD AGE HOMES OF ASSAM, INDIA

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Mayuri Bhagawati

Assistant Professor, Sociology, NERIM Law College, Guwahati

Utpal Deka

Assistant Professor, Discipline of Economics, Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam

Abstract

The life of a human being passes through different stages, during which individuals experience varied situations and challenges. Old age is widely regarded as the final stage of human life. It is often filled with rich experiences that render elderly people more knowledgeable and respectable within social contexts. This perception held true in most traditional societies, including India, where older adults were highly valued within the family structure. They typically exercised authority as the heads of joint families and provided leadership at the community level in political, religious, and other social spheres.

However, societal transformations (driven by rapid urbanization, expanded access to education, large-scale migration of the younger generation from rural areas, industrialization, and related factors) have significantly altered the lives of the elderly. The traditional care and support previously extended by family members are no longer as prevalent or reliable as in earlier times. In this evolving context, a growing section of older adults has chosen to shift to old age homes (OAHs) in search of a more secure and better quality of life.

This paper attempts to highlight the key reasons that compel elderly individuals to leave their own homes and relocate to institutional settings such as old age homes. By examining socio-demographic profiles and primary data from selected homes in Assam, the study sheds light on the underlying social, economic, and familial factors contributing to this trend.

Keywords: Elderly, old age homes, institutional care, societal changes, Assam

1 | INTRODUCTION

The rapidly increasing number of older persons is one of the most prominent demographic features of contemporary India. Population aging forms a critical dimension of demographic transition, with far-reaching social, economic, and policy implications, particularly for developing countries.

Globally, the number and proportion of people aged 60 years and above are rising steadily. In 2019, approximately one billion people worldwide were aged 60 or older. This figure is projected to increase to 1.4 billion by 2030 and 2.1 billion by 2050. Such growth is occurring at an unprecedented pace and is expected to accelerate in the coming decades, especially in developing nations. This profound demographic shift necessitates comprehensive adaptations across all sectors of society, including health and social care systems, transportation, housing, urban planning, and employment. Creating age-friendly societies has therefore become an essential and urgent global priority (WHO, 2023).

According to the 2011 Census of India, nearly 104 million elderly people (aged 60 years and above) resided in the country, comprising 53 million elderly women and 51 million elderly men. The steadily growing elderly population presents a significant challenge to planners and administrators. Since independence, India has witnessed sustained population growth, accompanied by a rising proportion of older adults and increasing social awareness regarding the need to ensure their security, dignity, and well-being.

Traditionally, elderly individuals in India occupied an honourable and respected position in society, reinforced by religious teachings, cultural values, and social norms. Hindu scriptures and other religious traditions emphasized moral and religious obligations on sons to care for their aging parents. These cultural norms fostered an age-integrated society where the elderly were not considered burdens but were assigned meaningful roles according to their age and capacity. Due to lower life expectancy in the past, fewer people survived into advanced old age. Care for the elderly was typically provided by relatives and the wider village community, supported by strong moral sanctions. Neglect of parents was socially stigmatized, and such responsibilities were effectively sustained under the joint family system.

Over time, however, significant changes in family structure and composition have emerged, adversely affecting traditional patterns of living and caregiving for older persons. Earlier, families were more stable, with limited migration and joint ownership of property. As sources of livelihood diversified, families gradually ceased to function as primary units of production and economic sustenance. New employment opportunities provided greater independence to the younger generation, encouraging migration for work. Women, who were traditionally the primary caregivers within the household, have increasingly joined the workforce outside the home, thereby reducing the time and attention available for family responsibilities. Consequently, these shifts in family structure have profoundly influenced the living conditions and support systems available to the elderly in contemporary India.

2 | REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies have examined the social issues confronting India's elderly population amid transitions from traditional to modern lifestyles. Muttagi (1997) highlighted how care and support for the elderly, once provided primarily by the family and secondarily by the community, have diminished. Traditional social norms and values that accorded high respect to older persons are eroding, particularly in urban areas, due to the decline of the

joint family system. Factors such as urbanization, industrialization, and educational expansion have transformed kinship and community roles. Although core values of respect and familial responsibility persist to some extent, the changing socio-economic landscape has introduced new challenges. A small but increasing percentage of elderly individuals now reside in institutions like old age homes, often requiring specialized care. The author noted gender-specific implications of aging: women often experience more traumatic transitions due to their central roles in domestic spheres. Role changes following a son's marriage or widowhood can trigger greater identity crises and status loss for women compared to men.

Rani (2001) focused on the challenges arising from a growing aging population in the context of societal changes. Technological advancements have altered younger generations' lifestyles and values, reducing their reliance on elders. Migrations of youth, increased female employment, and shifting priorities have collectively diminished attention toward older family members.

Akbar et al. (2014) observed that old age homes across India are often fully occupied. Their exploratory study in Northern India (Bareilly, Lucknow, and Varanasi) revealed that a majority of residents were female, largely illiterate or educated only up to the 8th standard, and included many widows and widowers. Most female residents had been housewives and remained financially dependent on family. Key factors driving relocation included misbehaviour by children, poverty (particularly among those from labour-class backgrounds), absence of a son, and reluctance to live with a married daughter due to cultural beliefs about attaining spiritual relief (moksha) after death. Additional reasons encompassed religious service (especially in Varanasi), loneliness, adjustment difficulties, children's settlement abroad, and the prevalence of nuclear families.

Vanitha (2014) argued that contemporary societal changes have compelled many elderly to seek refuge in old age homes. The study discussed common problems such as physical and mental health issues and initial adjustment difficulties with fellow residents. Institutions were found to provide comprehensive care covering multiple aspects of residents' lives.

Yadav (2014), in a study of elderly residents in Delhi old age homes, emphasized socio-economic backgrounds, reasons for institutionalization, and familial relationships. Loneliness at home emerged as a primary driver, alongside conflicting relationships with sons and a desire for independent, peaceful living. Women predominated among residents, largely due to limited income sources and resulting dependency.

Showkat (2016) explored the need for old age homes in Srinagar District, Jammu and Kashmir, linking it to broader societal modernization, urbanization, and transformations in family structure. Elderly individuals often struggle to adapt to modern lifestyles alongside younger family members. The study advocated for old age homes and day-care centers, especially for those with minimal interaction with children, neighbours, or relatives. Such facilities facilitate peer interaction, entertainment, and emotional sharing in a supportive environment. However, institutional care should be viewed only as a secondary option rather than a first choice.

Sharma (2017) offered a comparative analysis of public and private old age homes in Haryana and Delhi, examining policies, organizational functioning, socio-economic profiles of beneficiaries, quality of life, inmate problems, and satisfaction levels.

Das (2017) investigated socio-economic and health status among elderly residents in Kamrup Metro District, Assam, alongside social security provisions. Findings indicated a

higher proportion of elderly women at both national and state levels. Women lag in education (literacy rates among elderly males were roughly double those of females) and face greater dependency, especially in rural areas. Most old age home residents were female, unemployed, and previously insecure, socially isolated, economically vulnerable, and physically frail. Adjustment problems with sons and daughters-in-law reflected weakened emotional bonds within families. Other contributing factors included childlessness or reluctance to reside with married daughters, and living below the poverty line. While old age homes cannot fully replace familial environments, they often provide a greater sense of security across various life domains.

Sarmah (2010) additionally contributed insights into the socio-economic conditions of Assamese elderly in Guwahati, enriching the regional context of aging in Assam.

3 | OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To understand the socio-demographic profile of elderly residents living in old age homes (OAHs) in selected districts of Assam.
2. To identify and analyze the key reasons compelling elderly individuals to reside in old age homes.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. Primary data were collected from 10 old age homes randomly selected from four districts of Assam, namely Kamrup, Nalbari, Jorhat, and Golaghat. The study focused on elderly residents aged 60 years and above. Non-participant observation and structured interview schedules were employed for collecting primary information.

Secondary data were obtained from previous research studies, published journal articles, books, reports, and other relevant literature on aging, elderly care, and institutional support systems in India

5 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To address the study's objectives, the following tables present the primary data findings in percentage form, based on a sample of 50 elderly residents.

A clear gender imbalance is evident in the composition of residents, with females constituting a significantly higher proportion (76%) compared to males (24%). This finding is consistent with national demographic trends, which show greater longevity among women and their higher likelihood of economic dependency, ultimately pushing them toward institutional care.

With respect to marital status, the majority of respondents (64%) were either widows or widowers, with a markedly higher percentage among females (76.3%) than males (25%). This indicates that the loss of a spouse often leaves elderly persons, especially women, socially isolated and without adequate caregivers at home. Additionally, 30% of the respondents were unmarried (66.6% males and 18.4% females), largely due to the absence of their own family or lack of support from siblings and other relatives. Only 6% were

currently married, which included one childless couple and a few separated women who had left their husbands due to domestic torture.

Table 1: Gender-wise Socio-demographic Profile of the Inmates

Socio-demographic Variables	Male (N=12, 24%)	Female (N=38, 76%)	Total (N=50, %)
Age Group			
60-74	41.7	47.4	46.0
75-84	58.3	36.8	42.0
85 and above	0	15.8	12.0
Marital status			
Married	8.3	5.3	6.0
Unmarried	66.6	18.4	30.0
Widow/widower	25.0	76.3	64.0
Educational Qualifications			
No formal education	50.0	57.9	56.0
LP	8.3	13.2	12.0
ME	0	2.6	2.0
High School	0	2.6	2.0
HSLC	0	5.3	4.0
HS	8.3	5.3	6.0
Graduation	33.3	10.5	16.0
PG	0	2.6	2.0
Source of Income			
No income	58.0	63.2	62.0
Old age pension	0	10.5	8.0
Family pension	0	13.2	10.0
Own savings	8.3	5.3	6.0
Retired pensions	33.3	7.9	14.0

The educational profile of the inmates reveals a generally low level of literacy. More than two-thirds (68%) of the respondents had either no formal education or only lower primary schooling. This pattern closely mirrors the findings of Akbar et al. (2014). However, 18% of the respondents possessed graduate or postgraduate qualifications, with males showing a clear advantage in higher education (50% educated males compared to 42% educated females). This highlights the persistent gender gap in educational attainment even among the elderly population.

Economically, a large majority (62%) of the elderly residents had no independent source of income (58% males and 63.2% females). While a small proportion of women received old age pension or family pension, only 14% (mostly males) were drawing retired pensions from previous government or organized sector jobs. The combination of low educational attainment and lack of income sources intensifies dependency on family members, which frequently leads to eventual relocation to old age homes. Similar observations were reported by Akbar et al. (2014).

Table 2: Gender-wise Reasons for Coming to the OAH

Reasons for coming to OAH	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
No one to look after	58.3	44.7	48.0

Victim of witch-hunting	0.0	2.6	2.0
Poor economic condition	0.0	10.5	8.0
Only working daughter	0.0	2.6	2.0
No son, do not want to stay with married daughter	0.0	7.9	6.0
Son is bed ridden/no one to look after	0.0	2.6	2.0
Negligence by family and son	25.0	13.2	16.0
Abuse by family / son	8.3	13.2	12.0
Husband torture	0.0	2.6	2.0
Don't want to be burden of brother	8.3	0.0	2.0

The most frequently cited reason for moving to an old age home was “no one to look after them” (48%), with a higher percentage among males (58.3%). Notably, even among respondents who had sons — traditionally expected to provide care under Indian cultural norms — many reported negligence or abuse by family members as a major push factor. Other significant reasons included poor economic conditions, having only working daughters, absence of a son combined with reluctance to stay with a married daughter (rooted in cultural beliefs regarding spiritual salvation or *moksha*), unwillingness to burden other relatives, victimization through witch hunting, and spousal torture (particularly among women).

These findings are largely consistent with earlier studies conducted by Akbar et al. (2014) and Das (2017). The data further reveal that old age tends to bring greater hardships for women than for men. Women constitute the overwhelming majority of residents and are disproportionately affected by widowhood, unmarried status, low education, economic dependence, and strained family relationships.

In essence, old age homes have become a vital and often the last-resort option for many elderly individuals in Assam who seek security, basic care, and a dignified life when familial support systems fail or become dysfunctional.

6 | CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study clearly indicate that elderly individuals in Assam are increasingly compelled to seek shelter in old age homes due to a combination of social, economic, and familial factors. The primary reasons identified include the absence of anyone to look after them, poor economic conditions, having only working daughters, the lack of a son or unwillingness to stay with a married daughter, negligence by family members or sons, verbal and physical abuse by family, and the desire not to become a burden on other relatives. These circumstances reflect the broader erosion of traditional family support systems that once provided security and dignity to older persons in Indian society.

In the changing socio-cultural landscape of contemporary India, marked by urbanization, migration, nuclearization of families, and shifting value systems, old age homes have emerged as a significant and often necessary alternative living arrangement for many elderly people. For a large section of the respondents (particularly widowed or unmarried women with limited education and no independent source of income) institutional care

offers a safer, more secure, and relatively peaceful environment where their basic needs for food, shelter, medical care, and social interaction can be met.

However, it is important to recognize that old age homes, while providing essential support, cannot fully substitute the emotional warmth, affection, and sense of belonging that a caring family environment ideally offers. The study highlights the urgent need to strengthen intergenerational relationships and emotional bonding within families. Negligence, abuse, and abandonment of elderly parents not only violate traditional cultural values but also contribute significantly to the growing demand for institutional care.

At the same time, there is a critical role for both the government and voluntary organizations in addressing the challenges of population aging. Policymakers should focus on strengthening social security measures, enhancing the quality of existing old age homes, expanding community-based care services, and promoting active and healthy aging. Special attention must be given to vulnerable groups such as elderly women, the economically deprived, and those without family support. Awareness programs aimed at sensitizing the younger generation about their responsibilities toward aging parents can also play a preventive role in reducing family-level neglect and conflict.

In conclusion, while old age homes currently serve as a vital safety net for many elderly citizens in Assam, a more comprehensive, multi-pronged approach involving families, communities, civil society, and the state is essential to ensure that older persons can lead dignified, secure, and fulfilling lives in their later years.

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THE POPULIST RECONFIGURATION OF NARENDRA MODI'S ELECTORAL PROMISES (2014–2019)

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Hemanga Gogoi

Assistant Professor, Govt. Model College, Balipara

PhD Research Scholar, Department of Political Science at Gauhati University

Abstract

This article examines the transformation of populist politics in India through the leadership of Narendra Modi, focusing on the shift between the 2014 and 2019 general elections. It argues that Modi's political trajectory reflects a strategic reconfiguration of populism—from a development-oriented, anti-incumbency campaign in 2014, to a security-centric and majoritarian nationalist mobilisation in 2019. The article suggests that while populist leadership successfully consolidates political authority through charisma, marketing, and symbolic appeals, there are persistent gaps between promises and delivery. The rising wealth inequality and continued socio-economic distress pose significant challenges to democratic accountability.

Keywords: Modi, Populism, People, Election, Policies

1 | INTRODUCTION

In the transformative political landscape of India, the rise of Narendra Modi has been remarkable. From his outsider status in 2014 to the incumbent leader facing the economic challenges of 2019, Modi's journey reflects a shift in political strategies and power dynamics. Christophe Jafferlot contends that Modi, unable to replicate his initial development-oriented promises of the 2014 election, pivoted towards an ethnic-nationalist and security-centric approach in the 2019 election (Jafferlot & Verniers, 2020). The 2019 elections witnessed the dominance of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP),

securing a decisive victory that stunned the nation. Jaffrelot identifies five crucial factors contributing to this electoral triumph, with a primary focus on Modi's extraordinary personal popularity and his hyper-personalised campaign that projected him as a providential figure, particularly as a guardian of the poor and the nation (Jaffrelot & Verniers, 2020).

This article looks into Modi's political strategy, particularly his adept use of populist policies and promises to consolidate votes. Populism is widely understood in political theory as a "thin-centred ideology" that constructs politics as a moral struggle between a virtuous and homogeneous "people" and a corrupt, self-serving "elite." Populism in Indian politics goes beyond mere rhetoric. It signifies a multifaceted approach that aims to inspire public sentiment, fortify national identity, and redefine the very essence of the nation-state (Mohan, Padmanabhan, & Kennedy, 2021). The discourse around populism becomes a powerful tool, invoking sentiments of pride, nostalgia, and patriotism. Examining the populist landscape in India, Jaffrelot and Tillin (Jaffrelot & Tillin, *Populism in India*, 2017) identify three key types of populist politics in India. Two centred around national leaders—Indira Gandhi and Narendra Modi—and the third regional, focusing on the southern states of India. In the context of Modi's version of populism, particular attention is given to his success in attracting the people through promises and grand announcements. This article analyses the efficacy of Modi's populist measures, especially to the poor, whether they have translated into tangible improvements for the impoverished or remain as political promises. This study seeks to explore the relationship between populism, leadership, and the welfare of the citizens, how the promises made were dissected, their implementation, and the overall impact on the socio-economic fabric of India.

2 | MODI 1.0: THE VIKASPURUSH

In the electoral sweep of 2014, Narendra Modi's ascent to power was marked by an ambitious national-populist campaign, anchored in promises of development, a disdain for the establishment, and an ethnoreligious definition of the Indian populace (Jaffrelot, 2021). Central to this narrative was the "Gujarat model," symbolising aspirations for a brighter future amid economic challenges. Modi has portrayed himself as the man who will bring *Bikas* or Development to the country. His "Sabka Sath Sabka Vikas" campaign made him the *Vikaspurush*. The BJP's election manifesto echoed these aspirations, envisioning a transformation of rural areas into "rurban" India, complete with 100 smart cities embodying the latest technology and infrastructure (Saleem, 2021). Crucially, Modi's victory hinged on his ability to unite diverse population segments, ranging from the traditional BJP support base to the neo-middle class and the economically

disadvantaged. During the campaign, Modi vociferously pledged to uplift the poor, promising job opportunities and a share in economic growth. However, translating these promises into concrete policies fell short, giving rise to a widening wealth gap and increased inequalities.

After becoming the Prime Minister, Modi continued to position himself as a champion of the people, employing identity politics and emphasising his commitment to the dignity of the economically marginalised. The Mann Ki Baat radio program served as a platform for the people to voice their concerns, fostering a sense of self-esteem and dignity (Jaffrelot, 2021). However, the disparity between rhetoric and action became apparent as the Modi government exhibited a reluctance to continue pro-poor programs inherited from the previous administration. The Modi government attempts to distance itself from pro-poor programs inherited from the previous Congress-led government due to their high costs and the BJP's desire to contain the fiscal deficit. As a result, most MGNREGA funds disappeared mid-year. This leads to a decline in the number of people working 100 days per year, the aggregate number of days worked, and the average real MGNREGA wage rate. While the promises made during Modi 1.0 aimed at addressing poverty, the change in MGNREGA has created problem for the workers. Eventually MGNREGA was replaced by the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin), or VB-G RAM G Act, 2025 (The Print, 2025).

Jeffrelot in Modi's India has shown how the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (SBA), PM Jan-Dhan Yojana, and Ujjwala Yojana were promoted by Modi to attract the people. The SBA mission aimed to build 120 million toilets by October 2019, with 66.42 lakhs in urban India and 924 lakhs in rural India built by 2019 (Cited in Modi's India). However, surveys questioned the importance of this achievement, as many households did not use them or had a poor water supply (cited in Modi's India). The Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) was launched in 2014. PMJDY aimed to endow the people with dignity and recognition, not money. In 2017, a World Bank report estimated that 48 per cent of these accounts were "inactive." However, zero-balance accounts made up around 13.15 per cent of these accounts as of September 2019 28. The Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was launched in 2016, granting a Rs 1,600 subsidy to 80 million families living below the poverty line to provide them with natural gas. The PMUY has been particularly popular among poor women, who have otherwise had to cook surrounded by wood smoke. However, there is controversy regarding the reach of the scheme, as the government expanded its scope from 50 million households to 80 million in 2018, and a 2019 CAG report revealed that 71.9 million connections had taken place within the framework of the PMUY (Cited in Modi's India).

Modi's approach to pro-poor policies shifted from redistribution to dignity-oriented schemes, resonating with populist trends. However, the long-term success of these initiatives faced challenges, such as the tapering off of subsidies and a return to less eco-friendly cooking practices. The populist rhetoric reached its zenith during the demonetization of 2016, portrayed as a measure against the wealthy to cleanse the economy of illicit funds (Wallace, 2020). The Modi government failed to fulfil their promise to credit each person's bank account with Rs 15 lakh if it came to power in 2014. Despite claiming to address food prices, India fared worse than other South Asian countries in the recent Global Hunger Index (The Wire Staff, 2023). The government has failed to set up commodity-based farmers' organisations to annex decentralised production with centralised services, despite NCF's recommendation (Krishnam, 2019).

3 | MODI 2.0: THE CHOWKIDAR

In 2019, Narendra Modi's political strategy underwent a significant transformation from the development-centric focus of 2014. However, centrally-sponsored schemes like Swachh Bharat and Pradhan Mantri Ujjwal Yojna fell short of delivering substantial change to the people, prompting a shift towards a populist campaign centred on security issues (Wallace, 2020). The Pulwama attack, orchestrated by a Pakistani jihadi group and claiming the lives of 41 Indian personnel, became a pivotal moment. The BJP strategically associated Modi with the air strikes and military visuals, further reinforcing his image as a guardian of the nation. The prefix 'Chowkidar' added to Modi's Twitter handle became a symbol of this campaign, emphasising the theme of protection (Jafferlot & Verniers, 2020). The BJP's 2019 manifesto, titled 'Nation First,' outlined a populist agenda with a focus on national security, the welfare of soldiers, combating terrorism, coastal safety, and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The term "new" was used repeatedly, signifying a promise of change and development. The manifesto also prominently featured Modi, reinforcing his strongman image. Modi's 2019 election campaign was marked by a shift towards populist and nationalist themes, emphasising his role as a protector of the nation and Hindus (Saleem, 2021) (Jafferlot & Verniers, 2020). This strategic rebranding, combined with a reinforcement of welfare schemes, showcased a multifaceted approach to national populism tailored to the campaign's context.

Prime Minister Modi's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has faced criticism, revealing shortcomings in his leadership during the second wave. Despite challenges, several beneficiary schemes were implemented during this period. The Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojna (PMGKAY), initiated in March 2020, emerged as a Food Security Welfare Scheme providing free food grains to 80 crore people through the Public

Distribution System (Team, 2022). The Garib Kalyan Rozgaar Abhiyaan (GKRA) launched in June 2020, aimed to empower migrant workers and rural citizens, creating infrastructure and offering various types of work. Additionally, the Pradhan Mantri Street Vendor's Atmanirbhar Nidhi Scheme (PMSVA Nidhi Scheme) assisted street vendors in reclaiming their livelihoods amid the pandemic. The government's vaccination program, administering over 193 crore doses, has been a notable achievement, with a successful campaign for precautionary doses and widespread coverage for the adolescent population (Team, 2022). The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana continues to provide free health coverage for nearly 22 crore low-income Indians. Amid these welfare initiatives, the Make in India project strives to boost manufacturing to 25% of GDP by 2025. However, the manufacturing sector's contribution has remained above 15%, and experts doubt the target's achievement (Reality Check team, 2019). Modi's approach to handling the pandemic, coupled with populist welfare schemes, showcases a dynamic response to the challenges faced by the nation. While critiques exist, the concurrent focus on economic initiatives and public health demonstrates a nuanced strategy aimed at both immediate relief and long-term economic resilience.

Congress released a report card on Modi government 2.0, focusing on nine key areas: the economy, agriculture, farmers, corruption, China, national security, social harmony, welfare schemes, and COVID-19 mismanagement (Jha, 2023). The report questions Modi's failure to double farmers' income, honour agreements, repeal controversial farm laws, and provide a legal guarantee for MSP. The report also highlights rising prices of essential commodities, youth unemployment, and real wages for the poor. However, these critiques could not hard the vote banks of BJP as Modi government have successfully portray the Modi's image as the protector of the country, 'chowkidar', which become one of the main themes in his campaigning. Modi's hyper nationalist agenda such as the hard stance against Pakistan and the boycott of China, successfully invoked national sentiment among people and give BJP popularity to win the election.

3 | DREAMS AND THE BURDEN OF REALITY

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi aimed to achieve a \$5 trillion economy by 2024-2025, but the country's GDP reached \$3.75 trillion in 2023, indicating the goal is still far from achievable. India's chief economic advisor V. Anantha Nageswaran predicted a \$3 trillion economy by the end of the 2022-23 fiscal year and a \$7 trillion mark within seven years (The Wire Staff, 2023). This contradicts Modi's previous promise of a \$5 trillion economy. India's GDP, which was 7-8% when Modi assumed office, plummeted to a decade-low of 3.1% by the quarter of 2019-20 (Inamdar & Alluri, 2021). Bhartiya Janata

Party (BJP) in India's 2014 manifesto 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' aimed to develop high-impact domains like labour-intensive manufacturing and tourism to enhance employment. However, the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) found unemployment in the country at a 45-year high of 6.1% in a recent report. Since 2021, over 25 million people lost their jobs, and more than 75 million Indians, including a third of the middle class, slipped back into poverty, erasing the gains of the past five years (Inamdar & Alluri, 2021). According to Indian economist Ajit Ranade, Modi's government fell significantly short of the 20 million jobs needed annually, adding only about 4.3 million jobs per year over the last decade (Ranade, 2023).

The Statue of Unity, a vanity project for Narendra Modi in Gujarat, was funded by USD 370 million. The statue was marketed as a symbol of national pride and the tallest statue in the world, hoping to attract tourists and compensate for the fiscal cost. However, the statue failed to live up to its hype, and its social and environmental impact has been overlooked. The BJP government, led by Modi, aimed to double farmers' incomes by 2022, but their efforts have not been successful. The government's promise to buy products at 1.5 times the production cost was not specified, and the minimum support prices were not high enough. This led to a decline in the Wholesale Price Index and an inflation rate of 4.8%, negatively impacting trade between urban and rural India (The Wire Staff, 2023). In response, loans were waived in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, but many farmers lacked access to the banking system. Recent farm bills show the BJP's ignorance towards farmers. Public investment in agriculture-related infrastructure, such as irrigation, drainage, land development, water conservation, research development, and road connectivity, has failed to fulfil promises, succumbing to propaganda. The Modi government's infrastructure creation efforts are not improving, and rising fuel prices have eroded the benefits of the LPG subsidy.

The Indian government has spent 41 billion rupees (approximately \$500 million) on beautification efforts in preparation for the G20 Summit in New Delhi. The government has installed millions of flowers, murals, lights, and billboards featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi. However, encroachment drives have been carried out across Jamia Nagar and Badarpur, areas to hide the poor image of India (Bakhsh, 2023). Nearby areas, once filled with street vendors, have been deserted for over a month. The restrictions imposed for the summit have also affected street vendors and gig workers. A roundabout junction near the airport has been covered with tall green curtains, hiding a densely populated slum. Similarly, in 2020, a half-kilometre brick wall was built near the airport during Trump's visit to India, causing residents to accuse the government of hiding rather than

investing in improvements to a slum in Gujarat. The wall was built for security reasons and beautification, but the government denied hiding the slum. These two narratives illustrate the dichotomy within India, showcasing its facade of power and prosperity while simultaneously neglecting its vulnerable citizens. The government promoted the success of India in G20 among the media at the cost of these vulnerable citizens.

4.0 CONCLUSION

While Narendra Modi has undeniably positioned himself as a charismatic and populist leader. His success in leveraging the sentiments of the poor and presenting grand dreams has often overshadowed the real issues faced by the common person. During the 2014 general election, a strong anti-incumbency wave against the Congress Party, combined with the projection of Narendra Modi as the *Vikaspurush* (development man), significantly enhanced his appeal among the youth and aspirational classes. In contrast, the 2019 election witnessed a strategic shift in emphasis. By foregrounding issues of national security, Modi successfully mobilised hyper-nationalist sentiments and rebranded himself as the *chowkidar* (watchman), positioning himself as the vigilant guardian of the nation. The adept use of marketing and advertising strategies has created an image of a leader capable of achieving the seemingly impossible. However, beneath the surface of these extensive campaigns, the gap between promises made during elections and their fulfilment becomes apparent. This trend is not unique to the Modi government, as an issue brief by ORF reveals that the previous UPA government also struggled to fulfil many of its promises (Karwa, Goyal, & Deo, 2022). The cyclical nature of election promises and their subsequent shortcomings poses a significant challenge to the democratic process. In a democracy, voters cast their ballots based on trust and calculations, and the failure to deliver on promises erodes that trust. The exploitation of the public's short memory by politicians perpetuates a cycle of unfulfilled promises, ultimately resulting in the suffering of the people. Despite claims of success in promoting public welfare, a deeper analysis of policies and data reveals a failure to uphold commitments. Under Modi's leadership, India has witnessed an increase in wealth inequality, with a significant concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. The rise in the number of dollar millionaires contrasts starkly with the worsening poverty index and multimodal index, indicating that the poor are becoming increasingly marginalised. The cycle of broken promises has far-reaching consequences for the well-being of the nation, and it is incumbent upon the public to demand transparency, accountability, and genuine efforts to address the real issues faced by the common person.

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EXPLORING ROLES OF ASHA WORKERS THROUGH VARIOUS HEALTH SERVICES UNDER THE NRHM: A STUDY ON TEOK REVENUE CIRCLE OF JORHAT DISTRICT OF ASSAM.

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Sanju Kakoti

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, BSSR Viswavidyalaya, Golaghat

Dibya Jyoti Das

Ex-student, Department of Sociology, Dibrugarh University

Abstract

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) is a historical step of Indian health care system constituted by the Government of India (GOI) under the NRHM in 2005. ASHAs have successfully mobilized communities in terms of local health planning led to increase utilization of primary health care facilities and health care in the hands of the people. Recognizing the contributions of ASHA's and expanding their role in activism and advocacy would not only empower them further but also enhance their recognition within the community. The study shows that majority of the respondents promote the concept of institutional delivery among the pregnant women of their allotted areas, 77.6% respondents aware about the Janani Suraksha Scheme and promote the scheme within the concerned pregnant women.

Key Words: ASHA, NRHM, NHM, Institutional Delivery, MMR. Women health, Community Health Workers

1 | INTRODUCTION

Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) is a historical step of Indian health care system constituted by the Government of India (GOI) under the NRHM in 2005. ASHA workers are being instituted to maintain and mobilize immunization and to mobilize antenatal and post-natal care and institutional delivery. They are to assist basic medications and first contact health care and to promote nutrition and sanitation and hygiene practices. ASHA

workers act as an interface between rural and health service outlets and would play a crucial role to achieve the goals of Nation Health and population policies. They urge pregnant mothers for institutional delivery and breast feeding up to 6 months of age of their babies, Cystic Fibrosis (CF) after 6 months of age, vaccination, contraception and infant care. ASHA's like the backbone of the NRHM, they are intended to be affected by the community and health accountable to the village they serve. As reported by the National Health System resources centre there are 9, 83,032 ASHA workers in Indian. (Annual Asha Update report, 2020-2021)

With the introduced of Ayushman Bharat Programme, ASHAs in rural and urban areas are now became cornerstone to fulfill the goals of Ayushman Bharat and Health and wellness Centre. They have been assigned the role of providing oral care, eye care, Emergency care, ENT care, MNS care etc.

ASHA worker of the district Nayagarh of Odisha said- "we fell proud that the expansion of the package of service at the level of the AB-HWC is being done. It helps us render care for all members of the family. It will enhance our credibility with incentive for newer package our income per-household visit too shall increase, of course the competition to get selected as ASHA in the village will also get tougher".

Intensive evaluations have been done by ASHAs in strengthening primary health care in India. With the advent of ASHA under the NRHM during 2005-2006, there has been marked improvement in utilization of health care services at the peripheral level. According to Annual Report of Ministry of Health and Family Welfare 2010, ASHA workers contributed to an 80.07% improvement in institutional deliveries, demonstrating their vital role in enhancing Maternal and child health outcomes. In Uttar Pradesh, it has been reported that approx. 70% of institutional deliveries were improved and facilitated by ASHA workers (All India executive Summary, NRHM). As report said that infant mortality rate is declined 58 per one thousand life births in 2005 to 30 per one thousand life births in 2012. In terms of maternal mortality rates has been reduced to 100 per one lakh in 2012 from 301 in 2001 across India. Therefore, ASHA becomes a part and parcel in providing basic health care services to the rural people by creating awareness on health sector.

ASHAs have successfully mobilized communities in terms of local health planning led to increase utilization of primary health care facilities and placing health care in the hands of the people. Recognizing the contributions of ASHA's and expanding their role in activism and advocacy would not only empower them further but also enhance their recognition within the community. ASHA's hold significant potential in delivering primary health care at the village level.

In May, 2022 the world Health Organization recognized the 10.4 lakh ASHA workers as Global Health Leader for their efforts in continuing the community to the government's health programmes.

2 | OBJECTIVES

The study focused on ASHA workers in providing access health services by creating awareness and influences the rural inhabitation under the NRHM with reference to three BPHC in the Jorhat district of Assam. Its objectives are-----

- i) To evaluate the ASHA workers on their performances and obligations.
- ii) To explore socio-economic and educational background of ASHA workers.
- iii) To analyze the remuneration structure and correlate it with the nature and extent of work performed by ASHA's.
- iv) To understand the perceptions and outlook of other healthcare service providers and stakeholders regarding the role and activities of ASHA's.
- v) To identify the changes and problems facing by ASHA worker while carrying out their duties.

3 | METHODOLOGY

The methodology has been employed of this paper consists of the Statement of Problems, Research Design, Sampling methods and methods of data collection, data collection source and processing of data etc.

Statement of the Problems:

Empowering Community Health Workers through Accredited Social Health Activist is a cornerstone of the National Rural Health Mission's strategy to foster effective community participation in healthcare delivery by leveraging the primary healthcare approach. The NRHM aims to advance progress towards the millennium development goals (MDGS). To fully harness India's potential in achieving these objectives, it is crucial to evaluate the performance of health support system by focusing on the process of selection, recruitment training, supervision incentive, provision and the strategic expansion of CHW role.

Sampling design:

Universe of the study: The study was limited within the Jorhat district of Assam. Government of Assam appointed 967 ASHA workers among the Block Primary Health Centre(BPHC) containing Bhogamukh BPHC, Kakojan BPHC and Nakachari BPHC.

Sample Size: Total numbers of 219 ASHAs have been interviewed from three BPHCs. A number of 73 ASHA have been taken from the each BPHC in the Jorhat District of Assam.

Data collection methods: For the collection of data, the study employed primary and secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the roles, responsibilities and challenges faced by ASHA's.

Primary sources of data: Primary data were collected directly from ASHA workers directly. A Structures Interview Scheduled and Focused Group Discussion were employed to facilitate the data collection process.

(a) Secondary source of data:

Secondary data were gathered from a wide range of published and unpublished materials. These are includes-

- i) Research studies and academic articles.
- ii) Government and Non-government reports.
- iii) Books, Magazines and Research Journals.
- iv) National and International journals publications.
- v) Case studies and newspaper articles.

4| REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the article published by P Padda, et.al it has been found that to reduce the gap between in rural and urban health, India employed a significant step by ASHA workers, In Panjab out of 2841 pregnant women of urban areas 900(31.7) had an abortion whereas out of 5088 of pregnant women of rural area 1063(20.9%) ended in an abortion. So, 1941 and 4025 pregnant women formed the sample for the analysis to avoid bias, 92.6% of pregnant women living in urban areas had an institutional delivery and 7.4% delivered at home. They found that pregnant out women of urban had a higher still birth rate means 40.8% per 100 live births than pregnant women of rural that is 11.1% 100 live births. (P. Padda, et.al, 2013).

G Karol and B.K. Pattanaik in their article said, ASHA's knowledge of reproductive and child health care was assessed using a standardized test. They scored 90.5% in general reproductive awareness, Maternal Health Care consists 86.70% and child health care consists of 86.62%, however their knowledge about family planning and HIV/AIDS was lower, at 64.16%.

The study shown that ASHA's motivated 67.33% of women who got Antenatal Care, 72.28% of institutional deliveries 74.94% of women who got Postnatal Care, 80.78% of those who used child immunization service and only 30.49% of eligible couples who adopted family planning methods. This study shows that ASHA's are less effective in promoting family planning, especially in reducing high birth rates in rural areas. Therefore, ASHAs need to be trained in motivation and leadership. They also need support in providing family planning service and addressing issues like STD's and HIV/AID's

Shabana Fahren and Dr. Alka Asthama in their articles investigate the involvement of ASHA's in various health schemes such as Janani Suraksha Yojna, Janani Shisu Suraksha Karyakram and others. They found that introducing of ASHA under NHM ground level health status has improved gradually specially maternal and child health.

In 2013, H Bhattacharya and Colleagues discovered that nearly 90% of pregnant women were utilizing ASHA services. They also found that 95% of women in their sample had registered their pregnancies with ASHA's assistance contributing to 90% of these registrations. The study revealed that ASHA service was particularly beneficial for pregnant women aiding them receiving antenatal check-up, iron and folic acid supplements, laboratory tests etc.(babu,2021)

In 2008 the United Nations Population fund studied to assess the National Health program and found comparatively the rate of institutional delivery has transformed from 12% to 55% between 1992-93 and 2008. The maternal mortality rate has decreased to 100/1lac from 301 between 2001 and 2005 (Sanjay, 2014)

Selveraj et.al (2022) found that during the time of March2019 to May2019, 13 ASHA workers engaged to investigate the issue of Hepatitis Outbreak in a particular Peri-Urban area of Nagpur with around 9000 population. There were 192 people had been suspected as belonging as Hepatitis E. In that period ASHA worker played a crucial role and searched suspected cases, awaking people for diagnosis, mobilizing people to the outreach camp to investigate. While carrying out these activities the ASHA's faced

several challenges, such as logistical constraints disruption of other routine health related duties and difficulties in sustaining behavioral change within the community.

5 | DATA ANALYSIS

As the study is descriptive in nature, such kind of descriptive statistical analysis method have been used, the analysis of data is primarily based on primary data collected through questionnaire, interview schedule, observation also used focused group discussion.

Socio-economic status of ASHA workers

Table No: 1. Age wise distribution of ASHA workers-

Age category	No. of respondent	Percentage
20 to 29	42	19.17%
30 to 39	92	42%
40 to above	85	38.81%
Total	219	100%

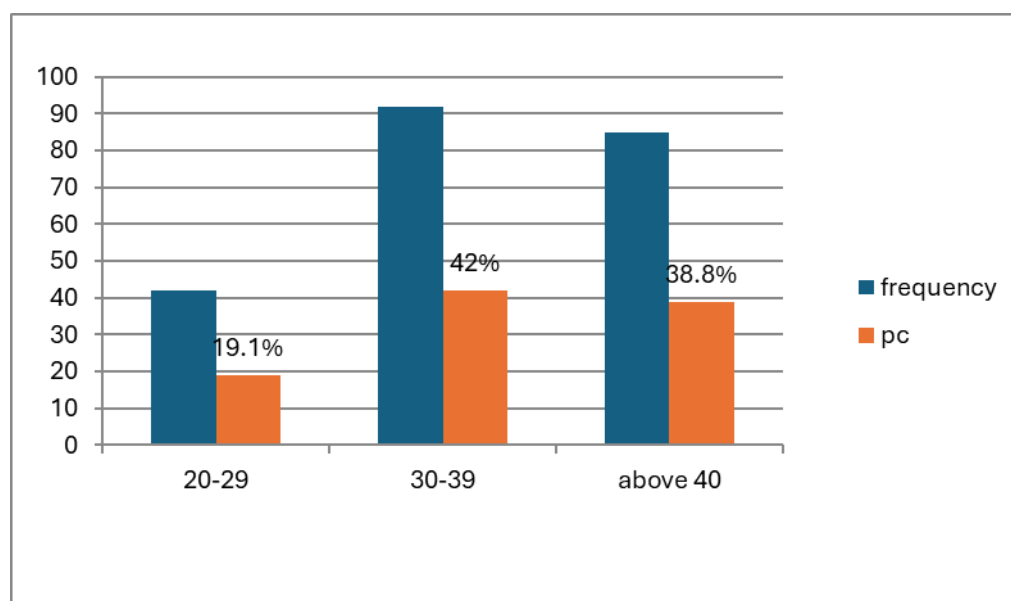


Figure: 1.1 Age wise distribution of ASHA workers

Table No: 1 shown Age wise distribution of ASHA workers. The age of ASHA's workers is classified into three broad categories from 20-29 years, 30-39 years and 40-49 years. Total no. of 219 ASHA's were interviewed for the study, majority (42%) of them are in the category of 30-39 years, 38.81% in the above 40 age group and 19.17% in the 20 to

29% age group. It shows that most of ASHA workers are in their middle age and are actively participating and working as healthcare providers.

Table No: 1.2. Educational qualification of the respondents:-

Qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Class 1 – 10	95	43.37%
Class 11- 12	120	54.7%
Graduation	04	1.8%
Post-Graduation	00	0%
Total	219	100%

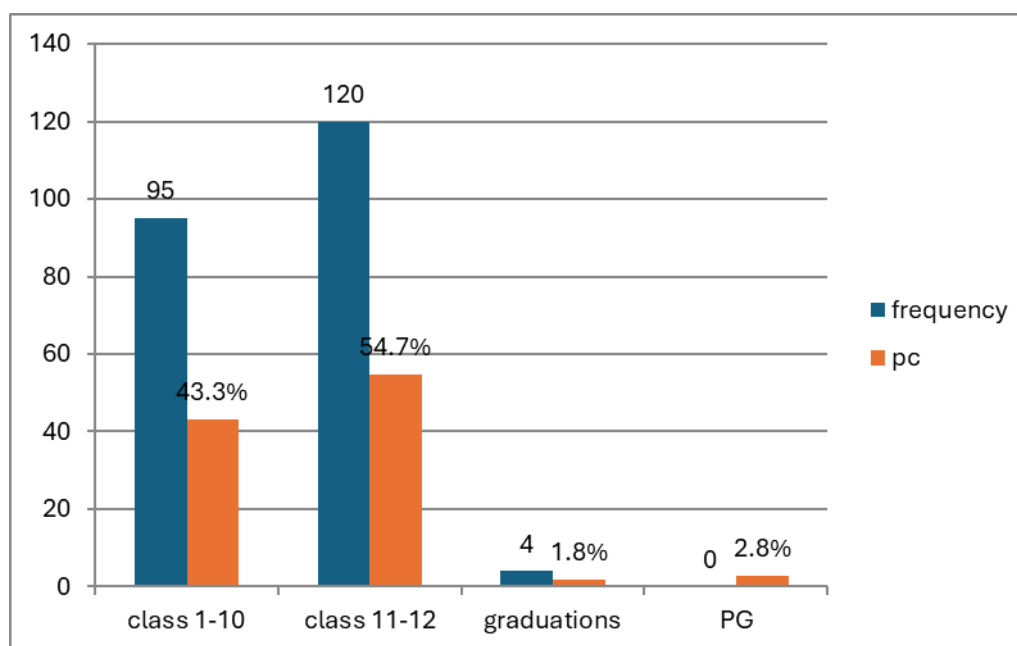


Figure: 1.2 Educational qualifications of respondents

Table No: 1.2, has shows the educational qualification of ASHA workers, out of the 219 respondent 54.7% ASHA workers are educated up to Higher Secondary followed by secondary 43.37% and 1.8% ASHA workers have completed their graduation.

Table No: 1.3: Family Occupations of respondents.

Family Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
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Agricultural-Labour	59	26.94%
Non-agricultural Labour	53	24.20%
Government service	14	6.39%
Private service	37	16.89%
Business	33	15.06%
Self-employment	17	7.76%
None	06	2.73%
Total	219	100%

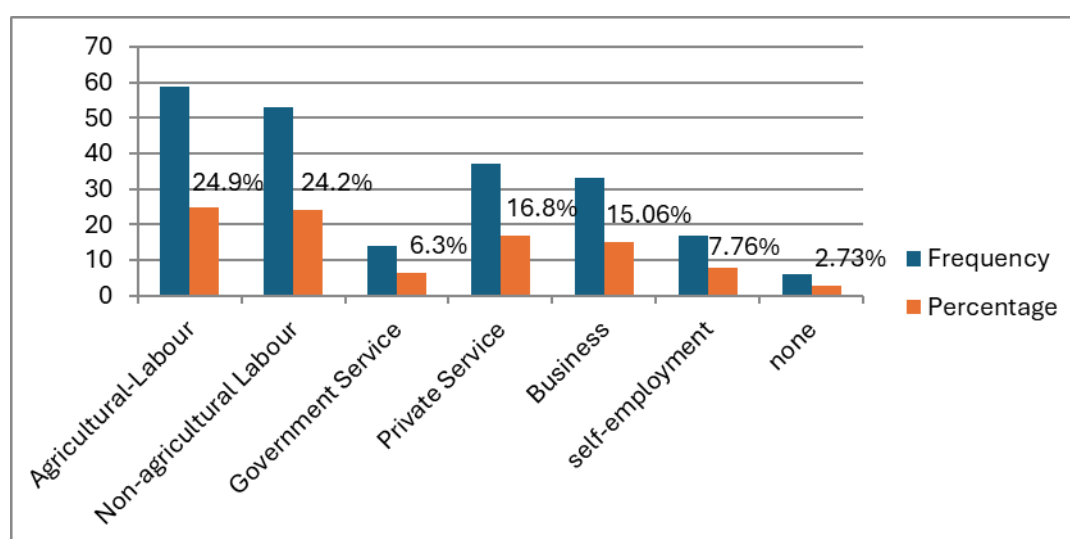


Figure: 1.3: Family Occupation of respondents.

Table No: 1.3, describes the occupations of the family of ASHA's workers. Among the 219 respondents, family members (26.94%) are engaged in agricultural labour followed by non-agricultural labour (24.20%), government services (6.39%), private service (16.89%), Business (15.6%) self employment (7.76%) and none (2.73%).

Table No: 1.4: Selection process of ASHA workers

Selection process of ASHA's	Frequency	Percentage
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Grampanchayat	201	95.89%
ASHA Supervisor	02	0.91%
Anganwadi	05	2.28%
Medical Officer	01	0.45%
Total	219	100%

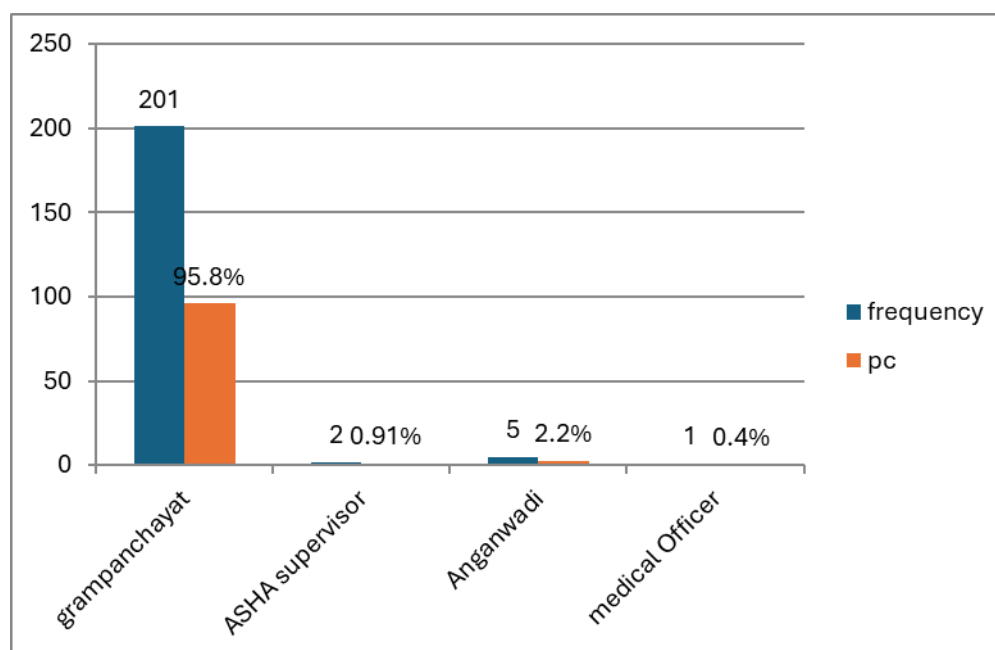


Figure: 1.4: Selection process of ASHA workers.

Above table explained the selection process of ASHA's workers. All 219 respondents were asked about their selection process of ASHA workers whether it was Grampanchayat, ASHA supervisor, Anganwadi, medical officer. On the basis of their opinion it is found that 95.89% respondent are selected through the Grampanchayat and 2.28% selected through the Anganwadi, 0.91% are selected through ASHA supervisor and 0.45% respondent are selected by Medical Officer.

Table No: 1.5: Length of service as ASHA worker:

Length of service as ASHA	Frequency	Percentage
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0-1 year	07	3.19%
1 to 5 year	24	10.95%
5 to 10 year	64	29.22%
Above 10 years	124	56.62%
Total	219	100%

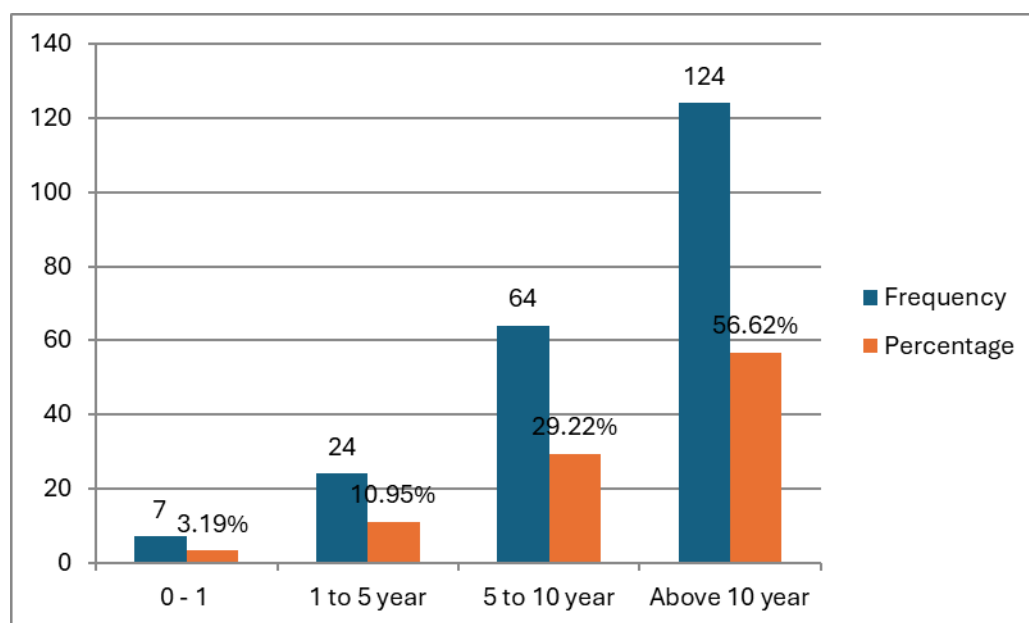


Figure: 1.5: Length of service as ASHA workers.

Table No 1.5 focused on length of service as ASHA workers. Length of service has been categorized as 0 to 1 year, 1 to 5 year, 5 to 10 year and above 10 year. On the basis of collected data it has been shows that 56.62% of respondents are included in the category of above 10 year, 29.22% of ASHA's workers which are included in the category of 5 to 10 year, 10.95% of respondents included in the 1 to 5 year category and only 3.19% of respondent which are included in the category of 0 to 1 year.

Table No: 1.6: Distance from the ASHA's residence to their allotted area's household:

Distance(KM)	Frequency	Percentage
0 – 1	103	47.03%
1 – 3	85	38.81%
3 – 6	21	9.58%
6 – 9	10	4.56%
Total	219	100%

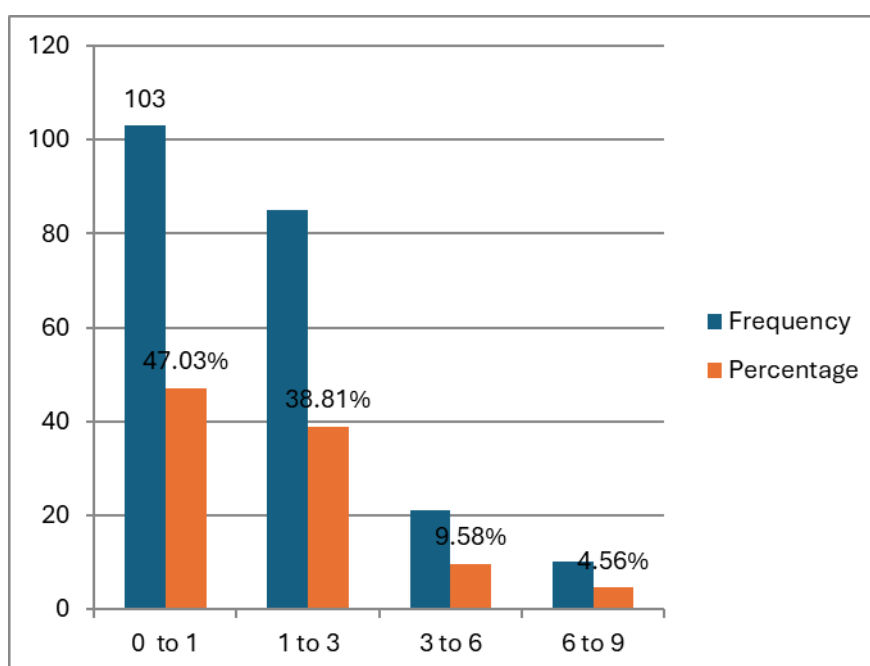


Figure: 1.6: Distance from the ASHA's residence to their allotted area's household.

Table No: 1.6, mention that how much distance travel by a respondent to render their services as ASHA workers, Among the respondent it is found the 47.03% ASHA workers travel 0 to 1 KM to render their services from their own households to allotted their area, followed by 38.81% of ASHA workers travel within 1 to 3 KM to render their services, 9.58% of ASHA workers travel from 3 to 6 KM to render their services and only 4.56% of ASHA workers travel within 6 to 9 KM to render their services.

Table No: 1.7: duration of induction training of ASHA workers:

Duration of training	Frequency	Percentage
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5 days	49	22.37%
7 days	44	20.09%
10 days	126	57.53%
Total	219	100%

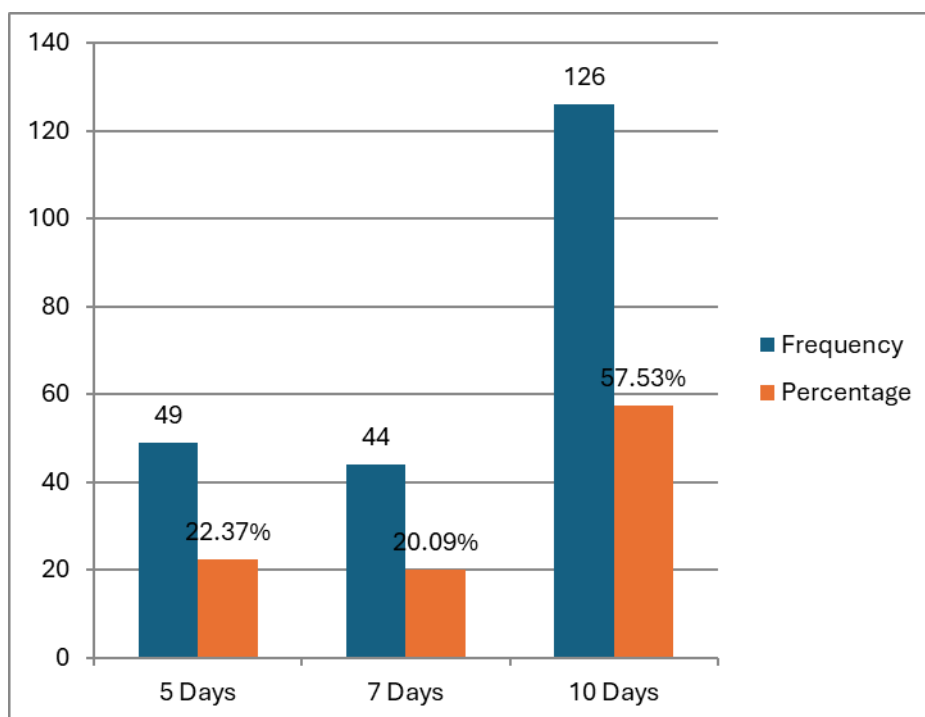


Figure: 1.7: Duration of induction training of ASHA workers

Generally, ASHA workers received 23 days of initial training spread across five episode but table No: 1.7, shows that ASHA workers received minimum 5 days to maximum 9 days 57.53% of the respondents received 10 days induction training followed by 22.37% of the respondents which received 5 days and 22.09% of the respondents received 7 days induction training program.

Table no: 1.8: Received ASHA ID and ASHA Kit

ASHA ID and ASHA Kit	Yes		No		Total
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	

ASHA ID	219	100%	00	0%	219
ASHA Kit	205	93.60%	14	6.39%	219

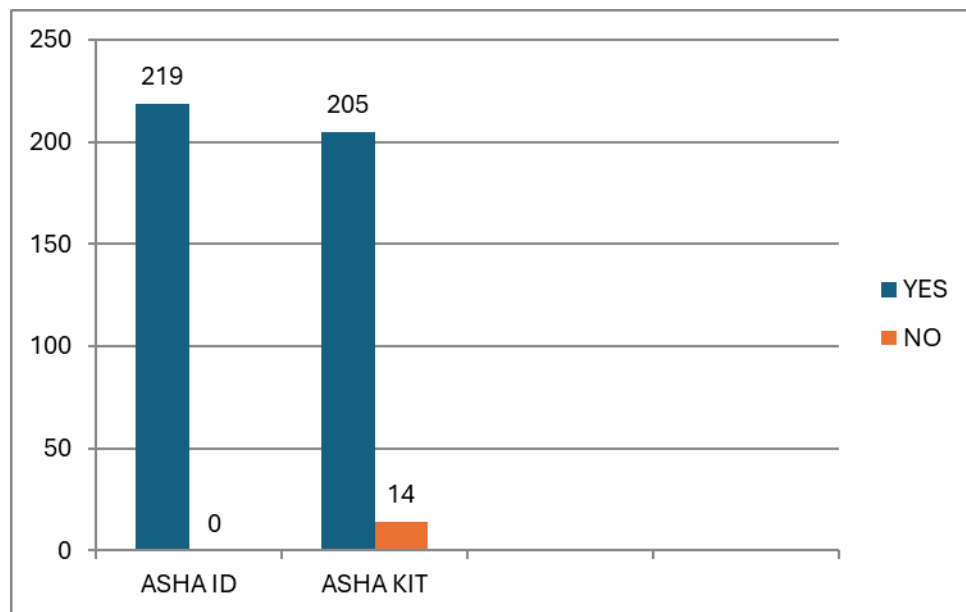


Figure: 1.8: Received ASHA ID and ASHA Kit

Table No: 1.8, has shows that number of respondents who received the ASHA ID and ASHA Kit. Among the 219 respondent all of the them have received ID card and only 14 respondent(6.39%) of ASHA workers did not received their ASHA Kits, whereas 205 ASHA workers has received their ASHA kits

Table No: 1.9: Awareness of respondent to prevent diarrhea:

Steps to prevent diarrhea	Respondents			
	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Hand washing practices	210	100%	00	00
Save drinking water	219	100%	00	00
Use of ORS	219	100%	00	00
Use of covered containers	198	91%	21	9.5%
Total	219		100%	

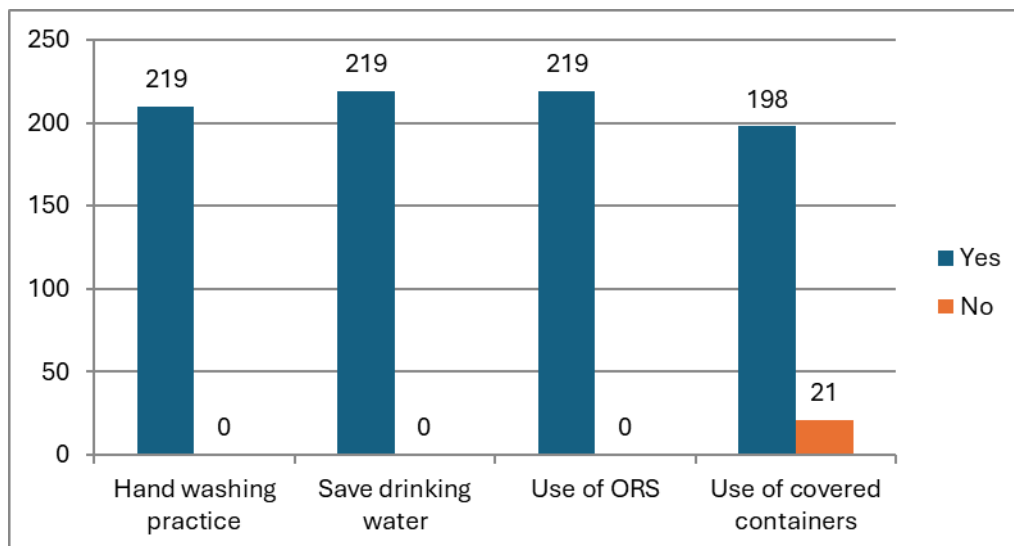


Figure: 1.9: Awareness of respondent to prevent Diarrhea

These table shows the awareness of ASHA workers to prevent diarrhea, among the respondent 100% ASHA workers are aware the steps for the prevention of diarrhea by hand wash practice, use of save drinking water, taking ORS etc, but among the total respondents 9.5% of respondent are not aware about the using of provide containers to prevent the diarrhea.

Table No: 2.0: Information about Janani Suraksha Yojna:

Know JSY	Frequancy	Percentage
Yes	170	77.62%
No	49	22.37%

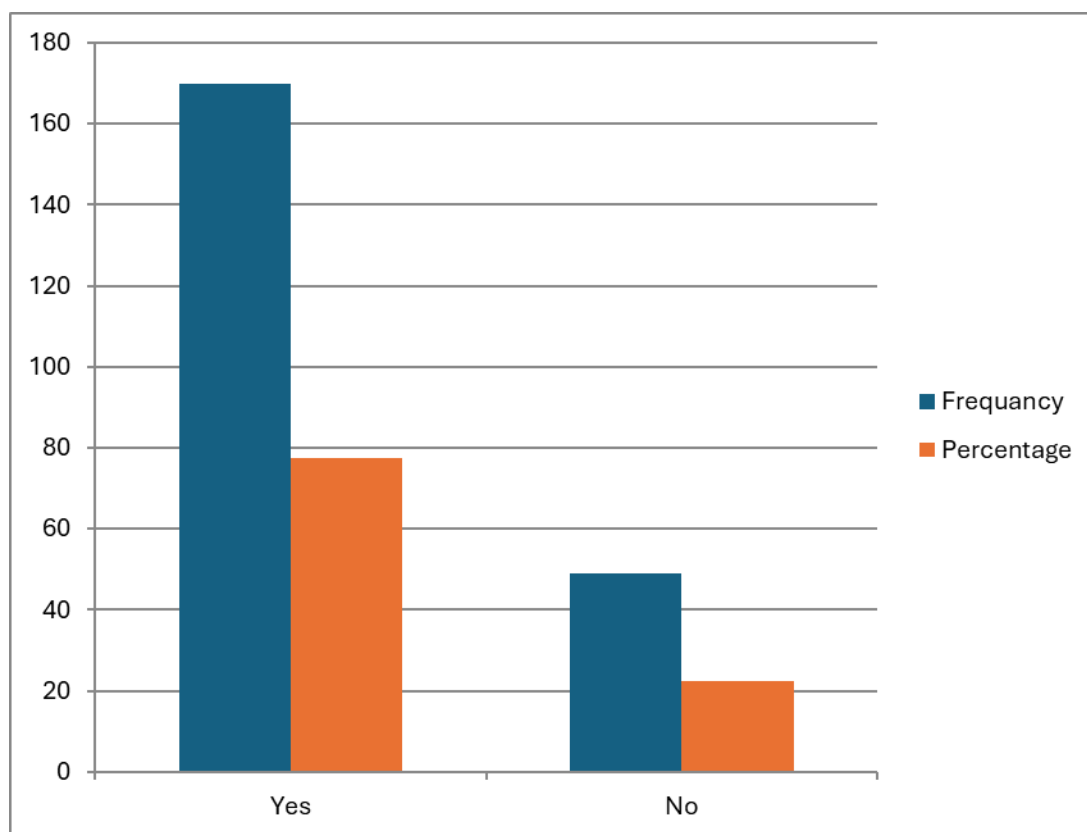


Figure: 2.0: Information about Janani Suraksha Yojna

This table has shown that awareness about the scheme of JSY under which SC/ST and BPL category women get cash incentives for institutional delivery. Among the respondents 77.6 percent respondents aware of this yojna and 22.3 percent are not aware of this.

Table No: 2.1: Information known by the ASHA workers regarding the NRHM:

Information	Number	Percentage
Community support for ASHA workers	104	47.48%
Services for patients	53	24.2%
Reducing MMR or IMR	17	7.7%
Infrastructure development	45	20.5%
Total	219	100%

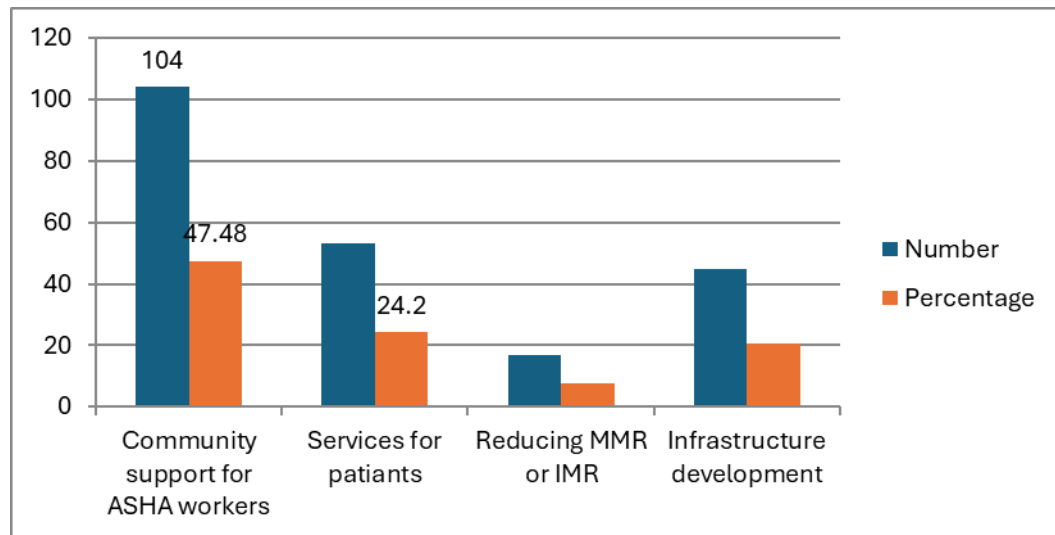


Figure: 2.1: Information known by the ASHA workers regarding the NRHM.

Table No: 2.1, shows the information status of ASHA workers towards NRHM, as per the responses collected from the ASHA workers it has shown that a percent of ASHA workers (47.48%) aware of the community support by NRHM for ASHA workers, 24.2% are services available for patients and 20.5% infrastructure development and 7.7% of ASHA are reducing MMR or

Table No: 2.2: Service by ASHA last 2 years:

Activity/Service	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	percentage
Provided ORS to children	219	100%	00	00
Provided oral pill	89	40%	130	59.36%
Provided condoms	95	43%	124	56.62%
Provided DOTS for TB	105	47%	114	52.05%
Organized health or nutution days	219	100%	00	00
Conducted immunization session	219	100%	00	00

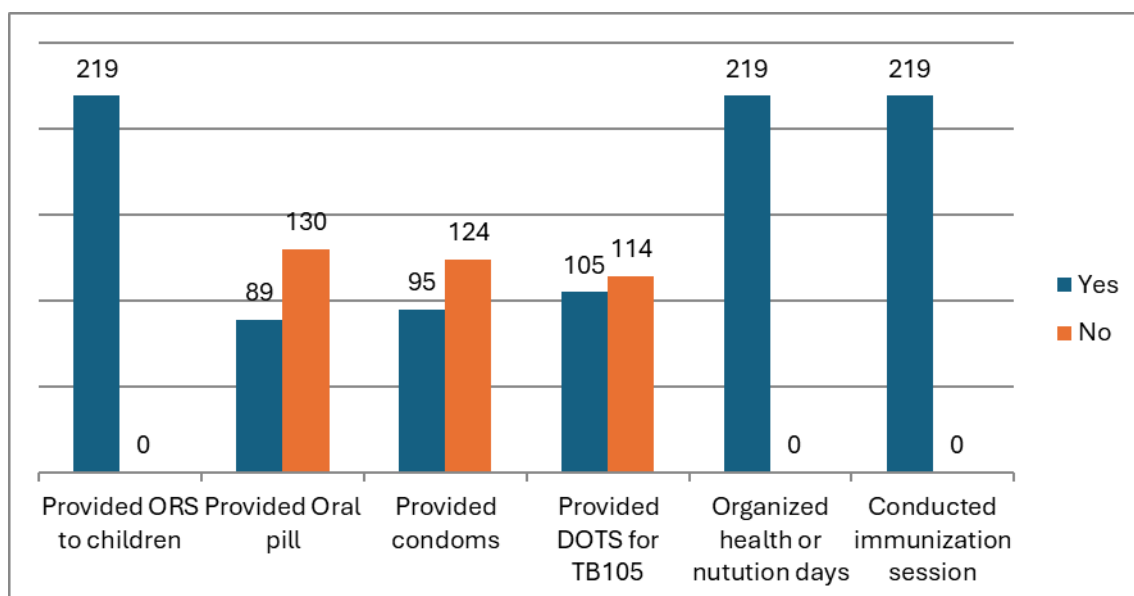


Figure: 2.2: Service by ASHA last 2 years

Table No: 2.2, has shows that service provided by ASHA during last 2 years. All the respondents have attended to provided ORS to children organized health or nutrition days and conducted immunization session 40% of the respondents attended to distribute oral Pills, 43% of respondent's attend to provided condoms and 47% respondents who provided DOTS for TB.

Table No: 2.3: Role of ASHA to create awareness:

Role	Member	percentage
Yes	202	91.3%
No	17	7.7%
Total	219	100%

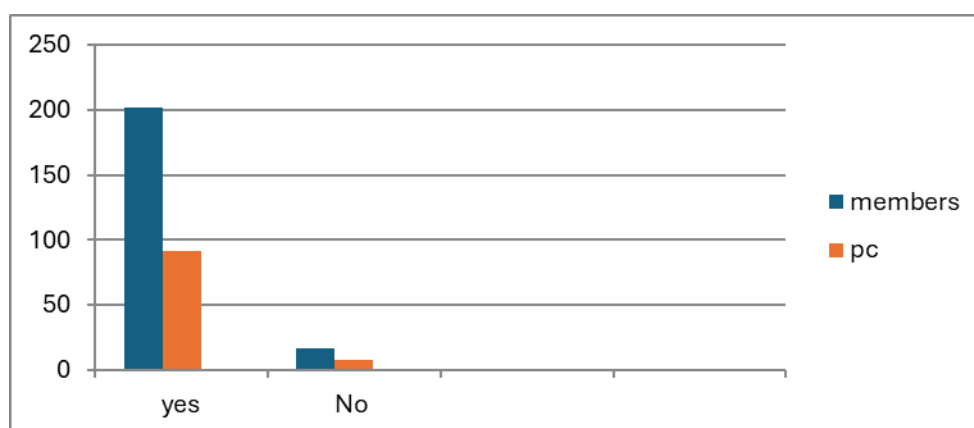


Figure: 2.3: Role of ASHA to create awareness

This table shows respondents are aware about the role as community mobilizers. 91.3% of respondents said they know their role as community mobilizers, only 7.7% don't know their role as community mobilizers.

Table No: 2.4: Facing problems as Community Mobilizers:

Problems	Members	Percentage
Yes	193	88.12
No	26	11.87%
Total	219	100%

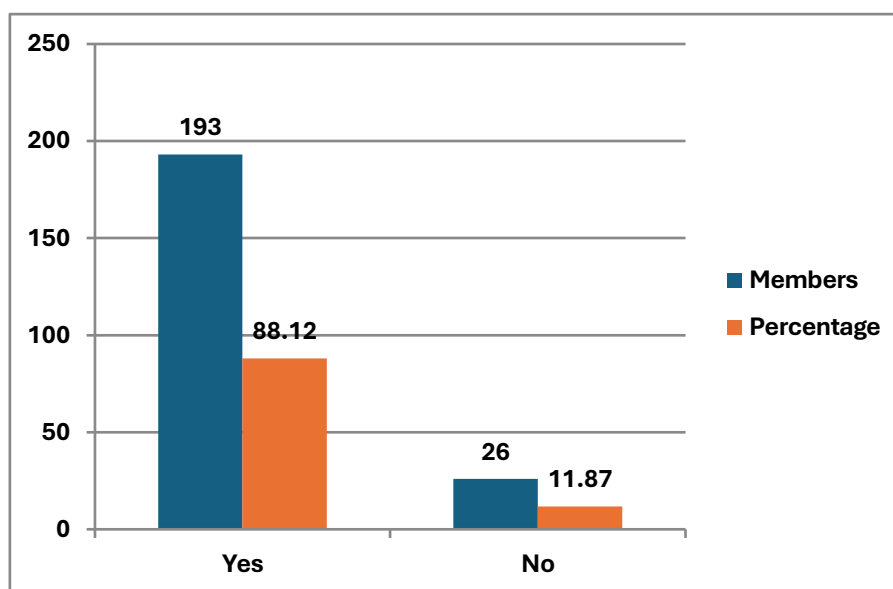


Figure: 2.4: Facing problems as Community Mobilizers

Table No: 2.4, explains the problems faced by ASHA members in mobilizing community. 88.12% of respondents said that they faced problems or difficulties in mobilizing the community and only 11.87% of members said they donot faced any difficulties in mobilizing the community.

Table No: 2.5: Getting incentives for promotion of institutional delivery:

Incentives for the promotions of institutional delivery	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	162	73.97%
No	57	26.02%
Total	219	100%

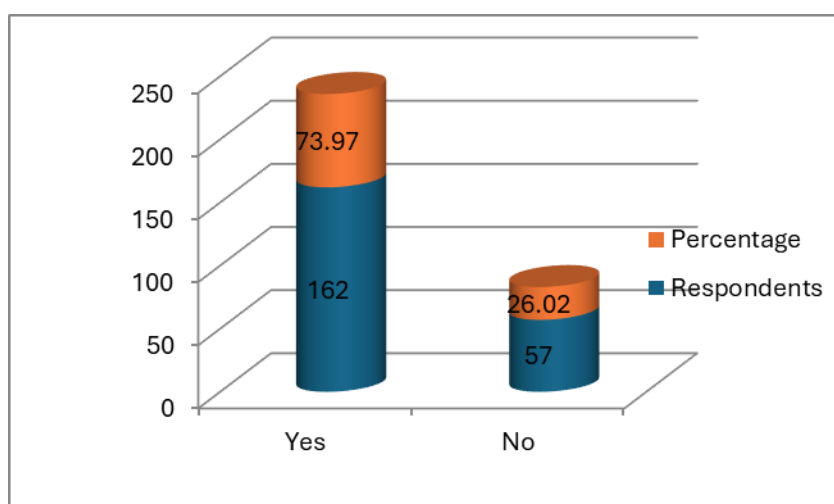
**Figure: 2.5: Getting incentives for promotion of institutional delivery**

Table No: 2.5, shows the percentage of respondents getting incentives for promotion of institutional delivery. 73.97% of respondents were said they were getting incentives for promotion of institutional delivery and only 26.02% respondents they were not getting incentives.

Table No: 2.6: Basic amenities available at ASHA workers at home.

Basic Amenities	Yes		No	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Water supply	198	90.4%	21	9.58%
Electricity	219	100%	00	00
LPG connection	213	97.26%	06	2.73%
Toilet	193	88.12%	26	11.87%

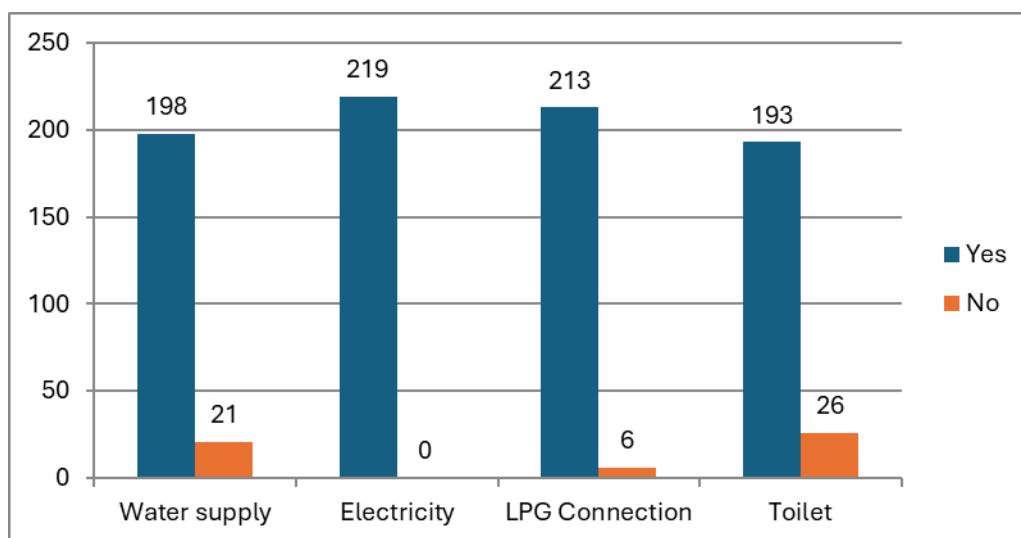


Figure: Basic Amenities available at ASHA workers at home.

Table No: 2.6, gives details of all the respondents or ASHA workers have electricity connection at their home, LPG connection 97.26% and water supply connection have 90.04% and 193 or 88.12% of respondent have the facilities of toilets at their home.

Table No: 2.7 types of houses of the respondents:

House types	Numbers	Percentage
Pucca house	36	16.43%
Katcha house	183	83.5%
Total	219	100%

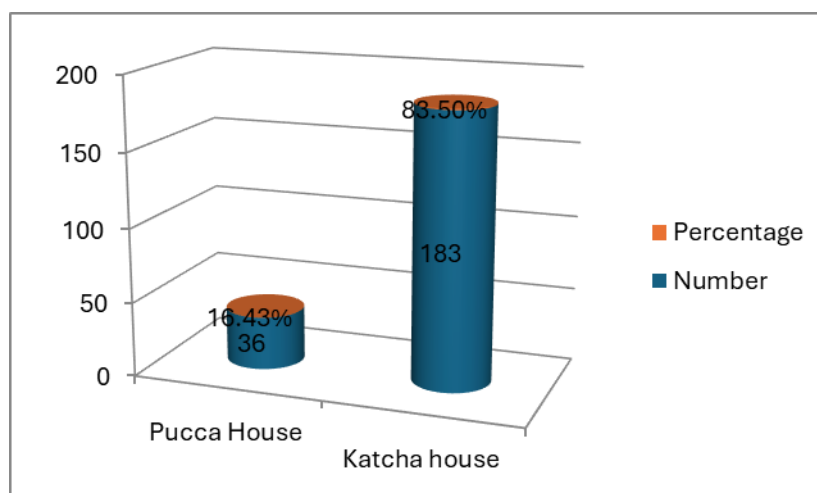


Figure: 2.7 types of houses of the respondents

Table No: 2.7, has shows that 183 member have katcha house and only 36 members who have pucca house.

Table No: 2.8: Average incentives received per month:

Incentives	Members	Percentage
0 - one thousand	17	7.76%
One to two thousands	15	6.84%
Two to three thousands	136	62.10%
Three to four thousands	45	20.54%
Four to five thousands	06	2.73%
Total	219	100%

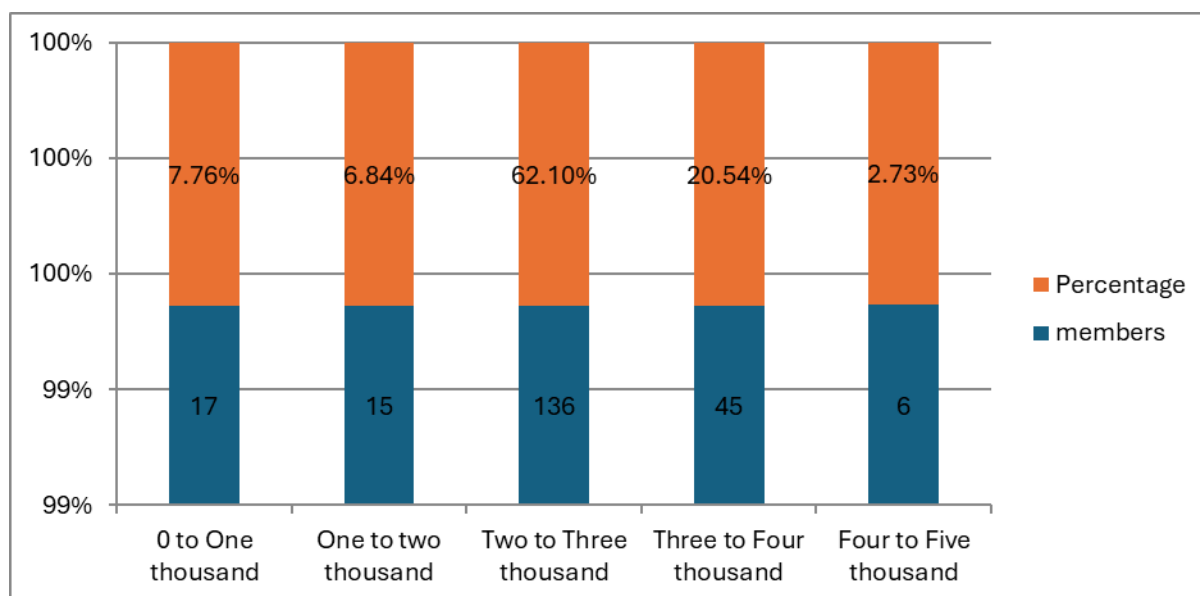


Figure 2.8: Average incentives received per month

This table shows that the average incentives received by ASHA workers, in which 136 members received from two to three thousand incentives and 20.54% respondents received three to four thousand and 7.76% respondents received one to two thousand and 6.84% respondents who received and lastly 2.73% of ASHA workers received four- five thousand rupees as an incentives.

Table No: 2.9: getting incentives in time:

Getting incentive in time	Members	Percentage
Yes	202	92.23%
No	17	7.76%
Total	219	100%

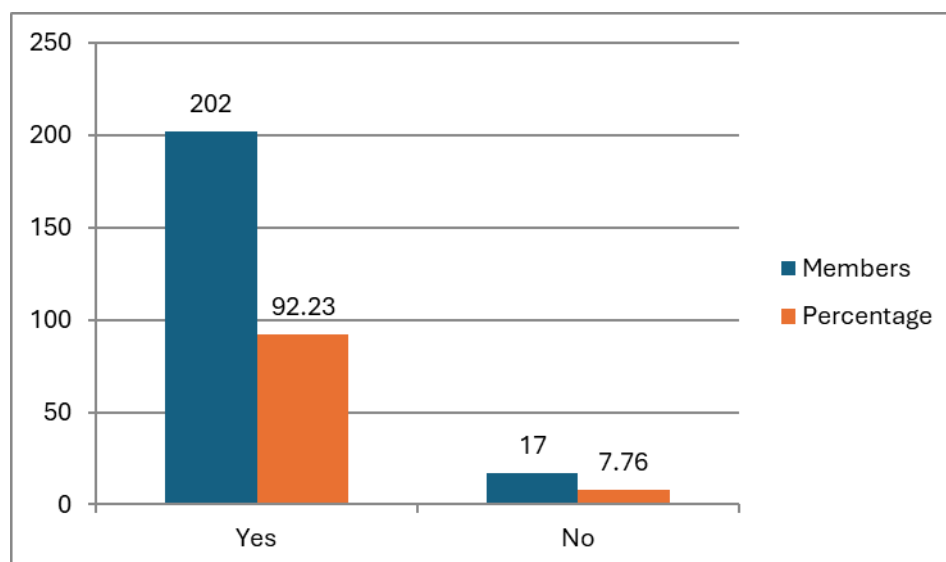


Figure: 2.9: Getting incentives in time

This table shows that 92.23% of ASHA workers said they get remuneration in time and 7.76% of ASHA workers who do not get remuneration on time.

5 | RESULT AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of collected information and interaction there are some major findings are found:

- Regarding the socio-economic background of ASHA, 42% are in the age category of 30-39 years and in terms of their education 54.7% respondent studied up to higher-secondary followed by 43.37% with secondary qualification.
- Among the respondents 83.5% ASHA workers reside in katchha house and all the respondents have electricity in their residence and 90.04% of the respondents have water supply connection and 97.26% of the respondents have L.P.G. connection and 88.12% of the respondents have toilets connection at their home.
- Among the total (219) respondents 95.89% were selected as ASHA workers through panchayat and almost all respondents (93.60) have received their ASHA Kit.
- Among the respondent 47.03% respondent travel to render their service from 0 to 1 KM from their residence to beneficiaries households.
- Regarding the training of ASHA workers, all respondents received induction training among them maximum respondents 57.53% received 10 days induction training followed by 22.37% of respondents received 5 days and 20.09% received 7 days induction training programme

- All the respondents received their ID card.
- In the context of knowledge of ASHA workers about health care services, among all respondents 47.48% of respondents aware about their community support for their allotted areas and only 7.7% of the respondents among all respondents they were aware about the reducing MMR & IMR.
- In this study it has found that during the period of 2023 to 2025 ASHA workers have done some duties such as providing ORS to children to protect diarrhea disease, among the respondents all the respondents distributed ORS. The study says that 40% of respondents were involving to distribute oral pill to prevent pregnancy, 43% of respondents distributes condom packets, among the respondents 47% respondents provided DOTS for TB patients and all the respondents conducted immunization session in their concerned area.
- The study shows that majority of the respondents promote the concept of institutional delivery among the pregnant women of their allotted areas, 77.6% respondents aware about the Janani Suraksha Scheme and promote the scheme within the concerned pregnant women.
- In this study found that some of problems faced by the ASHA workers such as specially lack of family support to work as ASHA, getting incentives, to motivate themselves to work as community mobilizers and getting problems to enhance the economic status and getting problems to orient the uneducated people regarding the matters of prevention of pregnancy, using condoms, oral pills, sterilization and any other else, 88.12% of the respondents have faced that mention problems.

6 | SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

This study evaluated the ASHA programme under the NRHM in three blocks across Jorhat district of Assam. It is found that working as an ASHA is a primary occupation for nearly all ASHA's while their spouses are mostly engaged in farming with no additional sources of livelihood. Around 56.62% of ASHA's have been in service for above ten years. Although 100% have received the mandated medical kits, these are not regularly replenished and often lack all required medicine, additionally about half of the ASHA's are responsible for serving populations exceeding 1000 people.

On the basis of study we can say that though all respondents have received induction training, the researcher observed that most were unable to recall the specific content, particularly in the area of community mobilization. This suggests a need to place greater

emphasis on training related to community mobilization, which is a key responsibility of ASHA's.

One of the prime responsibilities of ASHA workers is to promote institutional deliveries under the Janani Suraksha Scheme, the study shows that only 77.6% respondents are observed to have proper knowledge about the scheme JSY that why they needs a training.

On the basis of the study it can be magnified that there should be fixed salary for ASHA workers though they received time to time but these are not enough for ASHA workers.

On the basis of the study it is found that some ASHA workers need to travel far from their residence to their beneficiaries, therefore a policy should be made that they will be given electric scooters, which can set there should be provision for travel allowance to ASHA workers as they often have to spend from their savings.

ASHA's should be given smart phones to help them reported and to stay connected with beneficiaries. If needed, they can make a video call to a higher facility for consultation and show the patient to them.

ASHA workers need to visit PHC's for accompanying patients and for monthly meeting, therefore a specific office area should be available for wait and rest

ASHA's do not get printed stationery for reporting buying it is an additional financial burden for them. Therefore, all printed stationery should be supplied from the respective PHC's to ASHA's.

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IMPACT OF EDUCATION IN SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG MISHING TRIBES OF ASSAM: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY (BASED ON BAHFALA MISHING VILLAGE OF JORHAT DISTRICT, ASSAM)

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Srimanta Tamuli

Assistant Professor, Sarbodaya College, Jorhat, Assam

Abstract

The Mishing tribe, as the second largest Scheduled Tribe in Assam, has undergone significant social transformation driven by the spread of modern education, particularly in the post-independence period. Education has functioned as a vital instrument of socialization and a catalyst for changing traditional, agrarian-based lifestyles into more modern, diverse ones. Modern Education has acted as a catalyst for significant social transformation among the Mishing tribe of Assam, acting as a bridge between traditional, agrarian based living and a more progressive, mainstream lifestyle. A sociological study of this impact reveals a shift from reliance solely on agriculture towards diverse professions, enhanced status for women and increased political awareness, although challenges related to literacy, infrastructure and high dropout rates persist.

Keywords: *Education, Mishing tribe, change and challenges.*

1 | INTRODUCTION

Education is a concept with wide meaning as it encompasses the entire life of an individual and society. It has dimensions of Past, Present and Future. Education is a process of bi-polar nature. It is the interaction of the educator and the educand where the educator intends to modify the behaviours of the educand involving in interplay of the both.

Meaning of education can be obtained from angles etymological and the concepts developed by the great educators and philosophers. Etymologically, the word 'Education' is derived from Latin word 'Educare' which means to rear, to nourish, and bring up. Another Latin word associated with term education is 'Educere' which implies leading out. Psychologically speaking, education is a process of growth from within with varied stimuli from the environment. Education is one of the most Controversial subjects today. It is very ancient. The world looks for new ways to meet its present condition.

Education is one of the important factors of social change and also to meet the growing complexity of an ever-changing society, education is necessary. So from the sociological point of view education is what Vivekananda and Gandhiji give more stress. According to Vivekananda, "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man". Another philosopher, According to Gandhiji, Education is drawing the best in man Child body, mind and spirit.

So, Education is regarded as one of the basic factors in the process of social change. Education can be categorized into mainly two types on the basis of nature, scope and process of acquiring it, Viz- Formal Education and Information Education.

Social change is the change in society. Society is a web of social relationships. Hence, social change is a change in social relationships. It is the change in these which alone we shall regard as social change. Change means alternation, modification, replacement, differentiation or integration within a phenomenon over a particular period of time, caused by a force. In our society changes are bound to come. In some societies these changes are very slow while in others are rapid and fast. According to Gillin and Gillin, "Social changes are variations from the accepted modes of life; whether due to alternation in geographical conditions, in cultural equipments, Composition of the population or ideologies whether brought about by diffusion or inventions within the group." (Cultural Sociology) Sociologists According to Mac Iver and Page, "Social change refers to a process responsive to many types of changes, to change in man-made conditions of life, to changes in the attitude and beliefs of men, and to changes that go beyond the human control to the biological and physical nature of things." (Society : An Introductory analysis 1974).

Education and social change are inter-related. Education can change people's attitude, life style, standard of living etc. Indian society is considered as a plural society. There are different castes, tribes and religious group in India. Generally tribal people are backward than the non-tribal people in different aspects. So, it is important to study the different aspects of the tribal people and their social change. Keeping this view in mind the researcher wants to study the impact of education in social change among Mishing Tribe, which is an important plain tribe of Assam. Here 'Education' is meant for formal education.

The state of Assam located in the north Eastern part of India is a mosaic of tribes living in the hill and plain areas. According to 1991 census Assam has 12.69% Tribal population which is more than the national average of tribal population i.e. 8.00%. Among the tribes the Mishings (Miris) is the second largest tribal group in the plains and one displaying the closest rapport with the mighty river – Brahmaputra. As a rule the Mishings build their houses by the bank of a river perpendicular to its main stream. They build their houses on bamboo platforms raised about 5 ft. above the ground supported by rows of wooden posts. They generally live in one long rectangular hall varying from 50-150 ft. in length and 15-20 ft wide. A typical Mishing house has no complete inner partition.

Mishings (Miris) are generally inhabitant of eight districts Assam, Viz - Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Goalpara and Sonitpur. They are the inhabitant of the 'Brahmaputra Valley' of Assam. Their present population is near about 3 Lacs. 'Mishing' or 'Miri' – both these two words mean or suggest “good people” or “civilised people”. On the other hand according to Mr. E. Gait, 'Miris' means “Go between”.

In the Mishing society joint family structurer is common. Educationally the Mishings are not advanced. These people are also backward in different spheres of life. It is worth mentioning here that Jorhat district where this village is situated is one of the educationally advanced districts of Assam. The Main occupation of the Mishings is based on agriculture and poultry. The rural Mishing tribes are engaged in Agriculture, poultry, weaving and handicraft. Considering the above conditions the researcher has selected the topic 'Impact of Education in Social Change among Mishing Tribes of Assam: A Sociological Study'.

2 | OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study will be as follows:

1. To study the educational level of the people.
2. To find out the infrastructural facilities of education.
3. To see the economic condition of the people.
4. To see the social awareness among the people.
5. To study the impact of mass media among the people.
6. To study the changing attitude towards modernization among these people.

3 | FIELD AND METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Universe:

The universe of the study will be one of the Tribal village of Assam which is inhabited by the Mishings i.e. one of the important plain tribes of Assam. The village is Bahfala which is situated in the district of Jorhat under Dhekargara Block, Jorhat District, Assam. Originally, according to a popular belief, once there was a youngman in the village who could pull apart a bamboo (Bhaluka) with his hands and such an astounding feat of the young man resulted in the name of his village Bahfala. It is a flood affected area and lies at a distance of 20 K.M. from the nearest city Jorhat. In the north of the village there is Lality village and in the South there is Dhan Khuloi village. In the east and west there is Kolbari village and Charigaon and Neul Gaon. All these villages inhabited by the Mishings and Deori Tribes. There is only Five (5) primary schools located in the village, one (1) Middle School situated about 1½ Kms away from the village. One (1) High School and Higher Secondary School is situated about 3 Kms. away from the village one (1) Junior College is situated about 1 Km away from the village. One (1) Degree College is situated at a distance of 10 Kms away from the village. The nearest Primary Health Centre is located in the nearest neighbouring village Kolbari.

Methodology:***Hypothesis:***

- Availability of infrastructural facilities would enhance the level of education and brings social change.
- The level of education is inter related with attitudinal change and brings social change.

Sample:

The random sampling method will be adopted for the study.

Types of Data and Analysis:

Both primary and secondary data will be collected for the study. To collect primary data two processes will be applied –

1. Interview schedule
2. Participant observation

Secondary sources of data will be collected from books, different articles published in various Journals, census report and also from the villagers. Necessary statistical techniques will be adopted for findings.

4| DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS:

The field of the study is one of the Tribal villages of Assam which is inhabited by the Mishng i.e. one of the important plain tribes of Assam. The village is 'Bahfala' which is situated in the district of Jorhat under Dhekargora Development Block in the district of Jorhat, Assam. Originally, according to a popular belief, once there was a youngman in the village who could pull apart a bamboo (Bhaluka) with his hands and such an astounding fit of the youngman resulted in the name of his village 'Bahfala'. It is a flood affected area and lies at a distance of 20 Km from the nearest city Jorhat, and about 4 Kms away from the river Brahmaputra. 'Bahfala' is purely a Mishng village in a Mishng dominated area at a distance of 3 Km in the North-West of Alengmora Road which is the sub-division of Dhekargora Development Block under Jorhat district. This village is grown out of shifts resettlement after the great earthquake of 1950. It is bounded by Mishng village in all sides.

Climate and Rainfall:

The climate of the village is same as that of Brahmaputra valley. it is hot and humid with extensive rainfall, which reaches the peak position in the month of July and August. In summer the temperature rises up to 33° 50°C and in winter it comes down to 8.50°C.

During summer, i.e. May to August, rainfall is heavy in Jorhat district. In the lean season, ofcourse, occasional showers starts from the month of September and continue upto the month of February.

Household and Population:

There are 329 total households in the village, which are found during the time of field study. The head of the each 'Mishing' household was selected randomly as respondents for the present study. The households consist of the nuclear and Joint family types. In the 329 Mishings households, the population of the village is 2195. Out of the total population 1,195 are male and 1,000 are found female in the village.

Education:

Regarding Educational infrastructure it is found that there are only five (5) primary schools located in the village. One (1) Middle school situated about 1½ kms away from the village, one (1) High school and Higher Secondary School is situated about 3 Kms. away from village. One (1) Junior College is situated about 1 km. away from the village. One (1) Degree College is situated at a distance of 10 Kms away from the village. Thus it is seen that, the village is well exposed to educational facilities right from Lower primary to Degree level Education.

Economy and Occupation:

The main source of income of the village 'Bahfala' is agriculture. The people of the village raise both autumn paddy and winter paddy. The villagers give more importance to raise 'Sali' paddy than to 'Ahu' and 'Bao' paddy. The Sali paddy is transplanted in the month of June, July, August, September and harvested in November and December. Ahu paddy is sown in January of March and harvested during May, July.

Besides paddy, the farmers of the village cultivate some varieties of cash crops such as mustard, chillies, potatoes, pumkin, ginger etc. for both household consumption and market. Few households are engaged in cultivation of cabbage, ladyfinger, radish on commercial basis. The women folk of the village rear pig and hen earn cash. Besides agricultural production some of the households have other additional subsidiary sources of income like grocery shop business, tailoring, weaving, contract work with govt. departments, by pulling thela and rickshaw etc. These people are basically depends on agriculture for subsistence.

Food and Drinks:

The food habits of the people of the village under study are now-a-days similar with non-Mishing Assamese people. But while visiting the field it was observed that rice is the staple food of the villagers. They usually take three meals a day. The meal consists of boiled rice and curry prepared from leafy vegetables and edible roots, chicken, pork and fish of raw and dry in addition to these preparations. The villagers take pulses vegetables and chilli and their meals.

Besides rice the people of the village take 'Apong' along with their mid-day and evening meals. 'Apong' is a kind of traditional wine prepared by the Mishing tribe. But now-a-days some of the families offer tea and biscuits to the non-Mishing visitors. Use of betel and betelnuts are common among the villagers.

Communication:

The communication is not so good in the sample village. The village has P.W.D. Kaccha road. No regular bus services are available for the village people. In the rainy season, the Kaccha road becomes muddy and unsuitable for use. Sometimes water flows over some parts of the road during flood in this season.

Mass Media as a means of Communication:

Newspaper, Radio and Television contribute to the spread of new innovation as a means of communication, but however, it is limited only among few literate people. Regarding the mass media as a means of communication, the people of the village have access to News paper, Radio and Television and some of them possessed these of their own.

Change and Modernization:

There is a close relationship between change and modernization. Change, as the unchangeable law of society has taken an accelerative speed in the present age. Society, as a part of the vast nature is not an exception to this eternal law. The reality of social life is the reality of change, the impermanence of social being, the inconsistency of everything except the change itself. Change means alternation, modification, replacement, differentiation or integration within a phenomenon over a particular period of time, caused by a force. It refers to the amount of difference in condition of the object, in any direction, between two points of time. Time factor is the measuring rod of the amount and direction change. The speed of change depends on time, direction and nature of the object.

5 | SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will be significant from following points of view :

1. As schedule tribes people, especially the Mishing Tribes in Assam is considered as a weaker section of the society. So, it is important to study the social change among these people.
2. The study will be significant because education is considered as one of the key factors of social change and the researcher attempts to study the impact of education in social change among the Mishing Tribes of Assam.
3. In recent times very few studies have been made about various aspects of this tribal group. There is no such systematic sociological study on the impact of education among Mishing tribes of Assam has been done so far. So, this study will be significant from the sociological point of view and definitely lead to future research and planning.

6 | CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it may be concluded that the impact of education is important in bring social change among these tribal people. The increasing literacy rate among the respondents and children brings some changes in the social structure, social relationships and attitudes of the people. The Mishings are in general very hard-working people and well-adjusted by now to the weather of the valley and capable of providing just enough to make their both ends meet by the sweat of their brows. But something is still lacking.

The impact of education is important in all aspects of life. Without education and literacy a country or a nation cannot progress. Tribal people are the important sections of the society and they are recognised as weaker section. So it is necessary to educate all tribal people in different parts of the country. To know the social change and development of tribal people and to suggest remedial measures for upliftment of these people more research work may be undertaken by the future researchers.

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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN ASSAM: AN ANALYSIS

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Dharmendra Narayan Dev

Assistant Professor of Economics, Swami Yogananda Giri College, Saktiashram

Abstract

Assam is predominantly rural backward economy. The socio-economic condition of Assam is very weak. The state of Assam has medium human development out of total 36 India's State and Union Territories having value of the Human Development Index (HDI) as 0.655 which is less than 0.685 of India's HDI. Education, health and health care play a very important and crucial role in the development of a region. They are the basic social indicators of development. Human development needs investment in human capital like education and health. That is, human development promotes economic development through raising educational attainment and improving health. The main objective of the paper is to examine the performance of human development of Assam as per recent data. Further, the study wants to compare the human development of different districts using 2011 Census data. By taking into account some suitable variables like literacy rate, health statistics like child sex ratio and infant mortality rate along with per capita net district domestic product the study analyse inter-district level comparison of the performance of districts human development across the state of Assam. The findings of the study showing wide disparity in human development across the state of Assam need to develop the regions as per the indicators.

Key words: Human development; performance; education; health; income; disparity; Assam

1 | INTRODUCTION

There is a close relationship between human development and economic development. The relationship is of great significance in an underdeveloped economy like Assam. Often the definition of economic development links with the human development indicators of a region. The changes in human development indicators like literacy rate, sex ratio, mortality rate, per capita net state domestic product (NSDP) etc. brings changes in economic

development. India in general and Assam in particular is a backward economy having peculiar socio-economic and demographic characteristics. In recent times, the importance of literature on the topic like human development with respect to economic development has been increasing fast.

The state of Assam has medium human development out of total 36 India's State and Union Territories having value of the Human Development Index (HDI) as 0.655 which is less than 0.685 of India's HDI ("List of Indian States and Union Territories by Human Development Index," 2026). Education, health and health care play a very important and crucial role in the development of a region. They are the basic social indicators of development. Human development needs investment in human capital like education and health. That is, human development promotes economic development through raising educational attainment and improving health. Here, the study wants to compare the human development of different districts using 2011 Census data. By taking into account some suitable variables like literacy rate, health statistics like child sex ratio and infant mortality rate along with per capita net district domestic product the study analyse inter-district level comparison of the performance of districts human development across the state of Assam.

At present the state of Assam consist with 33 districts, viz, Sivasagar, Kamrup Metro, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Dima Hasao, Charaideo, Golaghat, Tinsukia, Nalbari, Kamrup, Hojai, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Udalguri, Bongaigaon, Sribhumi, Karbi-Anglong, Hailakandi, Dhemaji, Nagaon, Baksa, Kokrajhar, West Karbi-Anglong, Morigaon, Goalpara, Biswanath, Cachar, Barpeta, Chirang, Darrang, Dhubri and South Salmara. The region is predominantly rural and backward. The socio-economic condition of this vast region is very weak. The economy is generally identified by the different characteristics of a backward economy such as low per capita income, low human development, low capital formation, inadequate infrastructural facilities, geographical isolation, lack of industrial base and investment opportunities etc.

2| CONCEPT OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Development is a broader concept than just it means. It is much more than growth. It doesn't imply only mere increase in nation's gross national product (GNP). The sole aim of every nation is attainment of economic development. Accordingly, the countries are divided into various categories like developed, developing and less developed. Human development is a necessary and most important condition for economic development. To attain economic development and retain it to sustain improvement of human capitals like

education, health and health care are necessary. Education, health and health care play a very important and crucial role in the development of a society. They are the basic social indicators of development. Human development needs investment in human capital like education and health. That is human development promotes economic development through raising educational attainment and improving health. (Todaro & Smith, 2006).

Since its launch in 1990, the Human Development Report has defined human development as the process of enlarging peoples' choice as well as the raising of well-being achieved. The most important choices are to lead a long and healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living. In addition to these, political freedom, other guaranteed human rights and various ingredients of self-respect are the essential choices in the absence of which can block many other opportunities (*Human Development Report 1990 | Human Development Reports*, n.d.). Since the publication of first human development report, 1990 introduced by UNDP, UNDP developed various measurement of human development. UNDP developed broadly four composite indices to measure different aspects of human development in its successive HDR's such as Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Related Development Index (GDI), Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and Human Poverty Index (HPI). Among these measures the HDI is very important composite index to measure human development of the various countries and to rank them accordingly.

The HDI is a composite index which has been constructed every year since 1990, that measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development : A long and healthy life as measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge as measured by the adult literacy rate with third weights and combined gross enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools with one third weight; and a decent standard of living as measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) US dollars.

Alkire (2002) showed usefulness and limitations of dimensions of human development both in general and in particular Amartya Sen's capability approach. The author further discussed list of dimensions in relation to poverty studies, cross-cultural psychology, moral philosophy, quality of life indicators, participatory development, and basic needs and compares the different indicators (Alkire, 2002).

Haq (1995) explored in his book a new development paradigm whose central focus is on human well-being. Increase in income is treated as essential means but not as the end of development. His book also analysed the evolution of Human Development Index which is

a comprehensive measure of socio-economic progress of nations than traditional measure like gross domestic product (Haq, 1995).

The Book Concepts and Theories of Human Development is the most comprehensive and in-depth overview of the foundational theoretical contributions to understanding human development and the influence of these contributions for contemporary research and application in developmental science. The book discussed the implications of theory for research methods and for applications aimed at the promotion of health, positive development and social justice among diverse people across the life span (*Concepts and Theories of Human Development* | Richard M. Lerner | Taylo, n.d.)

There exists a strong connection between economic growth (EG) and human development (HD). On the one hand, EG provides the resources to permit sustained improvements in HD. On the other, improvements in the quality of the labour force are an important contributor to EG. Cross-country regressions show a significant relationship in both directions, with public expenditures on health and education especially important in the chain from EG to HD; and the investment rate and income distribution significant in the HD to EG chain (Ranis et al., 2000).

The Planning Commission of India, in the National Human Development Report (NHDR), 2001, defined and measured human development in India. The methodology used by the NHDR to measure human development at national and state level is almost same as that of the UNDP framework as- knowledge, health and income. (Nations, 2002). The NHDR 2001 computed human development separately for rural and urban areas for States and Union Territories for the years 1981 and 1991 and for the selected States for the year 2001. The all India HDI has improved from 0.302 in 1981 to 0.381 in 1991 and go up to 0.472 in 2001. In 2007-08, the HDI value declined to 0.467.

The Assam Human Development Report, 2014 presented a detailed report of human development of Assam by highlighting geographical, social, economic and institutional diversities of the state and their implications on aggregate human development outcomes. According to the report it was found that the human development index of Assam was 0.557 showing a steady and continuous improvement over the last 15 years. Further the district-wise and various diversities wise, both overall and dimensional achievements had shown wide variations. The district ranking based on the values of overall HDI puts Kamrup Metro at the top having value of the HDI as 0.703 followed by Jorhat with HDI as 0.655). The district Hailakandi had the lowest human development having the value of the

HDI as 0.437 (*Assam Human Development Report | Transformation and Development | Government Of Assam, India*, n.d.).

3| OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of the study can be summarised as under-

- (a) To examine the performance of human development of Assam as per recent data.
- (b) Further, the study wants to analyse comparative study on human development of the districts of Assam.

4| METHODOLOGY

The study is based on secondary sources data. The author uses secondary data available from Statistical Hand Book, Assam, 2024, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam, National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-20, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, Vital Statistics of India based on Civil Registration System, 2023, Office of Registrar General of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Assam at a Glance, 2021, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam and different government publication and research articles.

Here, the author uses indicators like Literacy rate (%), Child Sex Ratio (female child per 1000 male child), Infant mortality Rate and Per Capita Net District Domestic Product (at current prices 2019-20) for analysis of human development of the districts of Assam. For analytical convenience the study has taken three dimensions of human development such as education (knowledge), health and per capita income for decent standard of living. Here, the study has taken into account only literacy as education or knowledge component, infant mortality rate and child sex ratio as health dimension and per capita net district domestic product (NDDP) as standard of living or income component for measurement of human development.

For this the author computed deprivation index for each of the indices of human development of the districts of Assam which has been calculated using the deprivation method used by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 1990 for calculation of Human Development Index (HDI) for the nations of the World.

The deprivation index has been computed as-

$$\frac{\text{Actual Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}{\text{Maximum Value} - \text{Minimum Value}}$$

From literacy rate knowledge index has been computed. For health index has been constructed using the simple average of child sex ratio index and infant mortality rate. Since infant mortality rate (IMR) has indirect relationship with human development, for data uniformity index has been calculated as 1-IMR index. Finally, the income index has been calculated from per capita NDDP of the different districts as direct index. Finally, the HDI for each of the districts has been calculated as a simple average of the dimension indices like education, health and income indices with equal weights.

Based on the HDI value the districts are divided into three categories such as-

1. Backward- B (value lies between 0 to 0.499)
2. Developing- D (value lies between 0.500 to 0.799) and
3. Relatively Developed- RD (value lies between 0.800 to 1).

5| RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Table: 1 in the following shows the values of the various indicators of human development for the year 2024-

Table: 1: District wise values of Human Development Indicators of Assam, 2024

Sl. No.	Districts	Literacy rate (%) *	Child Sex Ratio**	Infant Mortality Rate***	Per capita NDDP (at current prices 2018-19) ****
1	Sivasagar	84.89	915	0	189348
2	Kamrup Metro	88.71	701	23	200262
3	Dibrugarh	76.05	1002	7	153914
4	Jorhat	82.78	833	1	125864
5	Dima Hasao	77.54	908	20	133404
6	Charaideo	74.11	1014	0	130406
7	Golaghat	77.43	1145	2	90882
8	Tinsukia	69.66	884	1	156545
9	Nalbari	78.63	994	0	72126
10	Kamrup	75.55	986	1	84353
11	Hojai	75.08	1017	3	79031
12	Sonitpur	68.56	1325	24	65743

13	Lakhimpur	77.20	985	27	59273
14	Majuli	78.56	754	0	75740
15	Udalguri	65.41	1255	2	60408
16	Bongaigaon	69.74	881	2	89693
17	Sribhum	78.22	885	68	54564
18	Karbi-Anglong	71.81	882	2	76304
19	Hailakandi	74.33	951	1	49985
20	Dhemaji	72.70	1022	3	46581
21	Nagaon	71.04	969	4	60338
22	Baksa	69.25	1097	0	50348
23	Kokrajhar	65.22	1003	0	78307
24	West Karbi-Anglong	63.35	1105	1	72647
25	Morigaon	68.03	1070	3	49204
26	Goalpara	67.37	1027	9	53139
27	Biswanath	64.72	1014	4	58660
28	Cachar	79.34	991	811	79714
29	Barpeta	63.81	1007	1	57665
30	Chirang	63.55	906	1	55162
31	Darrang	63.08	757	13	53688
32	Dhubri	61.23	914	2	38261
33	South Salmara	50.76	911	1	33638
	Assam	72.19	964	31	82078

Source: * Statistical Hand Book, Assam, 2024, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam

** National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-20, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India

*** Vital Statistics of India based on Civil Registration System, 2023, Office of Registrar General of India, Ministry of Home Affairs

**** Assam at a Glance, 2021, Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam

The Table 2 in the following has been estimated from Table 1 to show the performance of human development of the districts of Assam and its comparative position with the state.

Table 2: District wise Human Development Indices of Assam, 2024

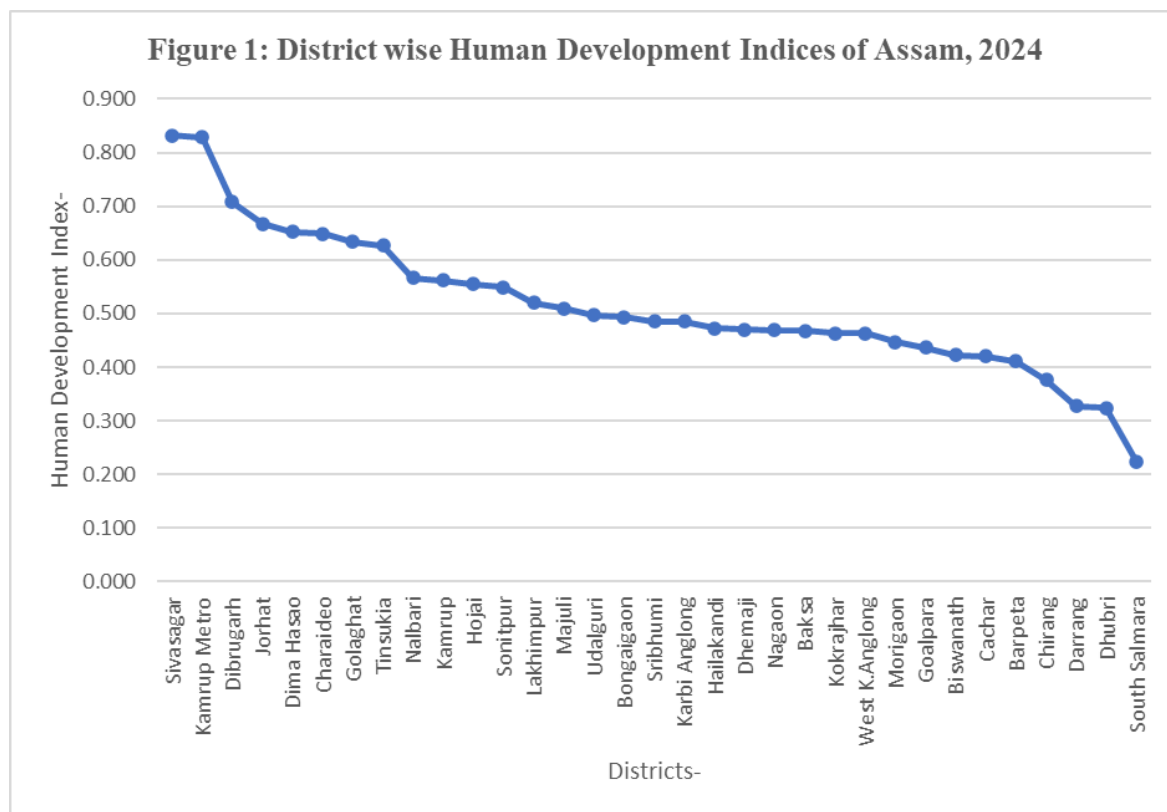
Districts	Knowledge index	Health index	Income index	HDI	Status	Rank
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sivasagar	0.889	0.671	0.934	0.832	RD	1
Kamrup Metro	1.000	0.486	1.000	0.829	RD	2
Dibrugarh	0.666	0.737	0.722	0.708	D	3
Jorhat	0.844	0.605	0.553	0.667	D	4
Dima Hasao	0.706	0.654	0.599	0.653	D	5
Charaideo	0.615	0.751	0.581	0.649	D	6
Golaghat	0.703	0.855	0.344	0.634	D	7
Tinsukia	0.498	0.646	0.738	0.627	D	8
Nalbari	0.734	0.735	0.231	0.567	D	9
Kamrup	0.653	0.728	0.304	0.562	D	10
Hojai	0.641	0.751	0.272	0.555	D	11
Sonitpur	0.469	0.985	0.193	0.549	D	12

Lakhimpur	0.697	0.711	0.154	0.520	D	13
Majuli	0.733	0.542	0.253	0.509	D	14
Udalguri	0.386	0.943	0.161	0.496	B	15
Bongaigaon	0.500	0.643	0.336	0.493	B	16
Sribhumii	0.724	0.606	0.126	0.485	B	17
Karbi-Anglong	0.555	0.644	0.256	0.485	B	18
Hailakandi	0.621	0.700	0.098	0.473	B	19
Dhemaji	0.578	0.755	0.078	0.470	B	20
Nagaon	0.534	0.712	0.160	0.469	B	21
Baksa	0.487	0.817	0.100	0.468	B	22
Kokrajhar	0.381	0.742	0.268	0.464	B	23
West Karbi-Anglong	0.332	0.823	0.234	0.463	B	24
Morigaon	0.455	0.794	0.093	0.447	B	25
Goalpara	0.438	0.756	0.117	0.437	B	26
Biswanath	0.368	0.748	0.150	0.422	B	27
Cachar	0.753	0.232	0.277	0.421	B	28
Barpeta	0.344	0.745	0.144	0.411	B	29
Chirang	0.337	0.664	0.129	0.377	B	30
Darrang	0.325	0.537	0.120	0.327	B	31
Dhubri	0.276	0.669	0.028	0.324	B	32
South Salmara	0.000	0.668	0.000	0.223	B	33
Assam	0.565	0.691	0.291	0.516	D	

Source: Author's own calculation

In the above Table 2, human development index (HDI) is shown in column 5 which is the simple average of the three indices i.e., column 2, column 3 and column 4. As shown in column 5 of the Table-2 the human development of Assam is developing having value of index as 0.516. The district Sivasagar has the highest human development with value of HDI as 0.832 followed by Kamrup Metro having HDI value as 0.829. There are 12 districts with human development status as developing. The study reveals that majority of the districts (19 districts) have backward human development status South Salmara being the least developed region having the HDI value as 0.223. Thus, it is evident from the above that the district Kamrup Metro and the districts of Upper Brahmaputra Valley and one Hill district Dima Hasao have more human development than that of districts of Lower Brahmaputra Valley and Barak valley. This is because the districts having more human development have more infrastructural facilities to provide education and access to health care. Furthermore, as such districts are industrially more advanced and have more entrepreneurial activities their per capita NDDP also increases than the lesser industrial activity districts. This are creating wide disparity across the districts of Assam.

The same results can be graphically shown as under-



6| CONCLUSION

From the above discussion it has been cleared that for sustainable economic development human development must have to improve. The investment in human capital in terms of education, health etc. brings more human development. Assam is one of the least developed states in human development out of the Indian states. This is due to the high differences in some of the indicators of human development. Therefore, the need of the hour is to improve population quality in such indicators where the region is relatively lacking. Proper infrastructures in education or health sector need to be improving in the unreached and more backward regions. Again, mere establishment of educational institutions and hospitals does not mean improvement of education and health sector and thus human development. The civic consciousness and willingness also have crucial role along with infrastructural base in this regard.

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SOCIAL MEDIA AND ITS IMPACT ON YOUTH IDENTITY AND SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

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Bijumoni Borah

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Maryam Ajmal Women's College of
Science and Technology, Hojai.

Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital technology has significantly transformed patterns of communication and social interaction, particularly among young people. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have become central spaces where youth construct identities and maintain social relationships. From a sociological perspective, these platforms influence how individuals present themselves, interact with peers, and form a sense of belonging. Drawing on sociological theories and the work of scholars such as Erving Goffman, Anthony Giddens, and Manuel Castells, this article examines how social media shapes youth identity and social relationships. The study finds that while social media provides opportunities for self-expression and connectivity, it also creates pressures related to self-presentation, social comparison, and digital dependency.

Keywords: *Social Media, Youth Identity, Social Relationships, Digital Communication, Socialization.*

1 | INTRODUCTION

The development of digital communication technologies has reshaped social interaction across the globe. Social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook have become important arenas for communication, entertainment and self-expression. Young people are among the most active users of these platforms, making social media a central component of contemporary youth culture.

In sociology, identity formation is understood as a dynamic process shaped through social interaction. According to Erving Goffman, individuals manage their self-presentation in social settings in ways similar to actors performing on a stage. Social media platforms

extend this idea by allowing users to carefully curate their online profiles and posts thereby shaping how others perceive them.

Similarly, Anthony Giddens argued that identity in modern society operates through digital networks that influence communication, power, and social relationships. Social media networks therefore reshape the ways in which young people connect, form communities and maintain relationships.

2 | METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a qualitative and theoretical research approach based on secondary data analysis. Relevant information was collected from sociological literature, academic journals, books, and research reports focusing on youth behaviour and digital communication.

The research draws on sociological theories of Identity, interaction, and network society to interpret how social media influences youth experiences. Theoretical frameworks from scholars such as Erving Goffman and Anthony Giddens are used to analyze the processes of self-presentation and identity formation in online spaces. Additionally, the concept of the network society proposed by Manuel Castells helps explain how digital communication networks reshape social relationships.

By synthesizing findings from existing studies, this research provides a sociological interpretation of the relationship between social media usage and youth identity development.

3 | DISCUSSION

Social Media has significantly transformed the ways in which young people construct their identities and maintain social relationships. From a sociological perspective, this transformation can be analyzed through several key dimensions.

First, social media serves as a platform for self –presentation and identity construction. According to Erving Goffman, individuals perform roles in everyday social life to create particular impressions. On social media, youth carefully select photos, captions, and content to present desirable images of themselves. The digital self-presentation allows them to express creativity and individuality while gaining social recognition.

Second, social media facilitates the formation and maintenance of social relationships. Online communication allows youth to stay connected with friends and communities across geographical boundaries. As noted by Manuel Castells, digital networks enable individuals to form social connections that are flexible, dynamic, and global in nature. Through likes, comments, and messages, social media strengthens peer interaction and creates virtual communities.

However, social media also creates certain challenges for youth identity and relationships. The culture of online visibility often encourages social comparison, where young people evaluate themselves based on the achievements, appearances, or lifestyles displayed by others. This may lead to feelings of insecurity, anxiety, or reduced self-esteem.

Furthermore, excessive reliance on digital communication may affect face-to-face relationships. Sociologists argue that while online networks expand communication opportunities, they may also weaken traditional forms of social interaction. The shift from physical interaction to digital communication can sometimes result in superficial relationships and reduced emotional intimacy.

Another concern is cyberbullying and online harassment. Negative interactions in digital spaces can have serious psychological and social consequences for young people. These experiences may influence their identity development and sense of belonging within peer groups.

Despite these challenges, social media also offers opportunities for empowerment and social participation. Youth can use digital platforms to express opinions, engage in social activism, and connect with diverse cultural communities. This demonstrates how social media can contribute both personal development and collective social change.

4| CONCLUSION

Social Media has become a powerful force shaping youth identity and social relationships in contemporary society. Platforms such as -Instagram and Facebook provides spaces where young people communicate, perform identities and build social networks. While social media provides opportunities for creativity, connection, and global engagement, it also presents challenges such as social comparison, cyberbullying, and reduced face-to-face communication. To maximize the benefits of social media it is important for society to promote digital literacy, responsible online behaviour, and balanced communication practices. By doing so, young people can develop healthy identities and meaningful social relationships in an increasingly digital world.

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THE GENDERED LENS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT IN INDIA

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Hemonta Kumar Hazarika

Assistant Professor, Centre for Juridical Studies, Dibrugarh University

Debasish Das

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Ujani Majuli Kherkatia College, Majuli

Jashashya Borah

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Duliajan Girls' College, Dibrugarh

Abstract

Domestic violence in India remains one of the most pervasive and structurally entrenched forms of gender-based violence, despite progressive legal interventions such as the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005. This paper critically examines the implementation of the Act through a gendered and intersectional framework, focusing on the gap between legal provisions and lived realities. While the PWDVA expanded the definition of domestic violence to include physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse, and introduced civil remedies for protection and rehabilitation, its impact remains uneven across socio-cultural contexts. Focusing on Assam as a case study, the paper highlights how regional socio-cultural dynamics and institutional limitations shape implementation outcomes. It concludes that legal reform alone is insufficient and calls for a multi-dimensional approach integrating legal enforcement, social transformation, and institutional strengthening.

Keywords: Domestic Violence; PWDVA 2005; Gender Inequality; Patriarchy; Intersectionality; Socio-Legal Analysis; Assam; India; Feminist Theory

1 | INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence in India represents a deeply entrenched social problem that extends far beyond individual acts of harm, reflecting broader structures of gender inequality and patriarchal control. Historically, violence within the household has been normalized and often treated as a private matter, shielded from public scrutiny and legal intervention. This normalization is rooted in long-standing socio-cultural norms that privilege male authority and subordinate women within

familial and societal hierarchies. As a result, many women experience various forms of abuse—physical, emotional, sexual, and economic—without recognition, support, or access to justice.

The enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA) in 2005 marked a significant turning point in India's legal landscape. Unlike earlier legal provisions that primarily focused on criminal punishment, the PWDVA introduced a more comprehensive and survivor-centric approach. It expanded the definition of domestic violence to include multiple dimensions of abuse and provided civil remedies such as protection orders, residence rights, and monetary relief. Importantly, the Act acknowledged the need for immediate support and rehabilitation, thereby shifting the focus from punitive justice to protective and restorative mechanisms.

Despite its progressive framework, the implementation of the PWDVA has revealed a persistent gap between legal provisions and lived realities. Empirical evidence, including findings from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), indicates that domestic violence remains widespread, with many women either unaware of their rights or unable to access institutional support. This gap suggests that the issue is not merely one of legal inadequacy but is deeply embedded in structural and cultural factors that shape both the occurrence of violence and the response to it.

This paper approaches the implementation of the PWDVA through a gendered and intersectional lens, emphasizing that domestic violence must be understood within the broader context of power relations, social norms, and economic dependencies. By examining both national trends and the specific socio-cultural context of Assam, the study aims to critically assess the limitations of legal reform and highlight the need for a more holistic approach. Ultimately, it argues that addressing domestic violence requires not only effective legal mechanisms but also transformative changes in societal attitudes and institutional practices.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of domestic violence in India has attracted significant scholarly attention across disciplines such as sociology, law, gender studies, and public policy. Existing literature consistently emphasizes that domestic violence is not merely an individual or familial problem but a structural phenomenon rooted in unequal gender relations and patriarchal social arrangements. Feminist scholars have been central in framing domestic violence as a manifestation of systemic oppression, arguing that it reflects the normalization of male dominance within both private and public spheres (Agnes, 2006; Chakravarti, 2003). These works highlight how cultural norms and institutional practices sustain and legitimize violence against women.

Early legal scholarship primarily focused on criminal law provisions, particularly Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, which addresses cruelty by husbands and their relatives. While this provision was considered a progressive step, scholars such as Baxi (1999) and Agnes (1995) pointed out its limitations, including its reactive nature and the challenges of proving abuse within domestic spaces. Critics also argued that criminal law alone cannot address the complexities of domestic violence, as it often fails to provide immediate relief or long-term support for survivors.

The enactment of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, marked a paradigm shift, and subsequent literature has extensively analyzed its scope and implications. Scholars such as Nivedita Menon (2012) and Indira Jaising (2007) have praised the Act for its expansive definition of domestic violence and its emphasis on civil remedies. The recognition of emotional and economic abuse, as well as the inclusion of live-in relationships, has been seen as a significant advancement in legal thinking. However, implementation-focused

studies reveal persistent challenges, including lack of awareness, inadequate institutional infrastructure, and delays in judicial processes (Kapur, 2010; Sinha, 2014).

A growing body of socio-legal research highlights the gap between law and practice. Studies based on empirical data, including the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), indicate that a large proportion of women do not report domestic violence due to fear, stigma, and economic dependency. Jejeebhoy and Cook (1997) argue that societal acceptance of wife-beating in certain contexts reflects deeply internalized patriarchal values. This normalization of violence complicates legal interventions, as women themselves may not perceive certain forms of abuse as unjust or actionable.

Intersectional perspectives have further enriched the literature by examining how multiple axes of identity—such as caste, class, religion, and geography—shape women’s experiences of domestic violence. Drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s concept of intersectionality, scholars have shown that marginalized women often face compounded vulnerabilities and barriers to justice (Rege, 2006; Guru, 2011). For instance, rural women and those from economically weaker sections are less likely to access legal remedies due to limited resources and institutional reach.

Theoretical contributions from Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault have also been applied to understand the subtle mechanisms through which domestic violence is reproduced. Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence explains how domination becomes internalized and perceived as natural, while Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power highlights how social norms regulate behavior and maintain control. These frameworks shift the focus from overt acts of violence to the underlying processes that sustain them.

Regional studies have pointed out significant variations in the prevalence and reporting of domestic violence across India. However, there remains a relative lack of focused research on northeastern states such as Assam. Existing studies suggest that socio-cultural practices, ethnic diversity, and infrastructural limitations influence both the occurrence of violence and the effectiveness of legal responses in the region.

Overall, the literature underscores that while the PWDVA represents a progressive legal framework, its implementation is constrained by broader socio-cultural and institutional factors. There is a clear need for more context-specific and interdisciplinary research that bridges the gap between legal analysis and lived realities. This paper seeks to contribute to this gap by offering a gendered and intersectional analysis with a focus on Assam.

3 | THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding domestic violence in India requires moving beyond a purely legal or individualistic explanation. It is not simply about isolated incidents of abuse but about a broader system of power relations, social norms, and institutional practices that shape everyday life. This study, therefore, adopts an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines feminist theory, Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence, Michel Foucault’s idea of disciplinary power, and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s framework of intersectionality. Together, these perspectives help to explain not only why domestic violence occurs but also why it persists despite legal interventions such as the PWDVA.

At the core of this framework lies **feminist theory**, which views domestic violence as a manifestation of patriarchy. Patriarchy is not just a set of attitudes but a structured system of power that privileges men and subordinates women across social institutions, including the family. Within the domestic sphere, this power often translates into control over women’s

mobility, decision-making, labor, and sexuality. Feminist scholars argue that violence becomes a tool through which this control is maintained and reinforced. Importantly, feminist theory shifts the focus from blaming individual perpetrators to examining the larger social conditions that normalize and sustain violence. In the Indian context, practices such as dowry, son preference, and rigid gender roles further reinforce these inequalities, making domestic violence both visible and invisible at the same time.

While feminist theory highlights structural inequality, **Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence** helps explain how such inequality becomes internalized. Symbolic violence refers to subtle, often invisible forms of domination that are accepted as natural by both the dominant and the dominated. In the context of domestic violence, women may come to perceive certain abusive behaviors—such as verbal humiliation, control over finances, or restrictions on mobility—as normal aspects of married life. This internalization is not a sign of consent but a reflection of deep social conditioning. It explains why many women do not report violence or seek legal help, even when laws like the PWDVA exist. Thus, violence is not always enforced through physical force; it is also reproduced through everyday beliefs, practices, and expectations.

Complementing this is **Michel Foucault's notion of disciplinary power**, which focuses on how power operates through norms, surveillance, and self-regulation. Unlike traditional forms of power that rely on coercion, disciplinary power works by shaping individuals' behavior in subtle ways. In the context of domestic violence, societal expectations regarding “good women” or “ideal wives” play a crucial role. Women are often expected to be obedient, tolerant, and self-sacrificing, while men are positioned as authority figures. These norms are reinforced by family members, community networks, and even state institutions. As a result, women may regulate their own behavior to conform to these expectations, often at the cost of their safety and well-being. This perspective helps us understand why domestic violence remains underreported and why resistance is often limited.

Finally, **Kimberlé Crenshaw's framework of intersectionality** adds another critical dimension by emphasizing that women's experiences are not uniform. Gender intersects with other social categories such as caste, class, religion, ethnicity, and location to shape both vulnerability to violence and access to justice. For instance, a woman in a rural area of Assam may face different challenges compared to an urban, middle-class woman. Limited access to education, economic resources, and institutional support can significantly constrain her ability to seek help. Similarly, women from marginalized communities may experience additional layers of discrimination that further complicate their situation. Intersectionality, therefore, moves the analysis beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and highlights the need for context-specific understanding.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive lens for analyzing domestic violence and the implementation of the PWDVA. They reveal that domestic violence is not merely an act of individual wrongdoing but a deeply embedded social phenomenon sustained through structural inequalities, cultural norms, and intersecting identities. This framework allows the study to critically examine not only the limitations of legal mechanisms but also the broader social realities that shape their effectiveness.

4 | METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This study adopts a **qualitative, socio-legal research design** to critically examine the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, through a gendered and intersectional lens. Given the complex and socially embedded nature of domestic violence, a qualitative approach is particularly suitable as it enables a deeper understanding of the relationship between legal provisions and lived realities. The research is

primarily **analytical and interpretive** in nature. It does not rely on primary fieldwork but instead draws upon a wide range of **secondary sources** to explore patterns, themes, and structural issues. In this regard data are collected from various sources like Government Reports and Survey, legal documents, academic literature, articles and websites. The study integrates legal analysis with sociological and feminist perspectives, allowing for a holistic understanding of domestic violence beyond a purely doctrinal framework.

4.1 Scope and Limitations

The study focuses on the **implementation of the PWDVA in India**, with particular emphasis on Assam as a case study. While the use of secondary data allows for a broad and comprehensive analysis, it also presents certain limitations. The absence of primary fieldwork means that the study relies on existing data and interpretations, which may not capture all recent developments or localized nuances. However, the use of diverse and credible sources helps to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

4.2 Ethical Considerations

As the research is based entirely on secondary sources, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. Nevertheless, ethical standards have been maintained by ensuring proper acknowledgment of sources and avoiding misrepresentation of data.

5 | THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT, 2005

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, represents a significant milestone in India's legal response to gender-based violence. Prior to its enactment, legal remedies for domestic violence were largely limited and fragmented, primarily addressed through criminal provisions such as Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code. While these provisions recognized cruelty within marriage, they were often criticized for being reactive, punitive, and insufficient in addressing the immediate needs of survivors. The PWDVA marked a shift from this narrow approach by introducing a more comprehensive, rights-based, and survivor-centric legal framework.

One of the most important features of the Act is its **broad and inclusive definition of domestic violence**. Unlike earlier laws that focused mainly on physical harm, the PWDVA recognizes that violence can take multiple forms. It includes **physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse**, thereby acknowledging the diverse ways in which women experience harm within domestic relationships. This expanded definition is particularly significant because many forms of abuse—such as verbal humiliation, financial control, or restrictions on mobility—often go unrecognized but have profound impacts on women's well-being.

Another progressive aspect of the Act is its **wide scope of applicability**. The PWDVA does not limit protection to legally married women but extends it to women in relationships "in the nature of marriage," including live-in relationships. It also covers a broad range of domestic relationships, including those involving mothers, sisters, daughters, and other female relatives living in a shared household. This inclusive approach reflects an understanding of the diverse family structures present in Indian society.

The Act is primarily **civil in nature**, which distinguishes it from earlier criminal law approaches. Its primary aim is not to punish the perpetrator but to provide **immediate relief and protection to the aggrieved woman**. It introduces several important remedies, including:

- **Protection Orders**, which prohibit the respondent from committing further acts of violence or contacting the survivor.
- **Residence Orders**, ensuring that women have the right to reside in the shared household, regardless of ownership or title.
- **Monetary Relief**, which includes compensation for expenses, loss of earnings, and maintenance.
- **Custody Orders**, granting temporary custody of children to the aggrieved woman.
- **Compensation Orders**, providing damages for mental and physical harm.

These provisions are designed to address both the immediate and long-term needs of survivors, offering them a degree of security and stability.

A key institutional feature of the PWDVA is the appointment of **Protection Officers**, who are responsible for assisting survivors in accessing legal remedies, filing applications, and coordinating with various agencies. The Act also recognizes the role of **Service Providers**, including non-governmental organizations, medical institutions, and shelter homes, in offering support services such as counseling, medical aid, and temporary accommodation. This multi-agency approach reflects an understanding that addressing domestic violence requires more than just legal intervention; it requires a coordinated support system.

Despite its progressive framework, the effectiveness of the PWDVA largely depends on its implementation. In practice, several challenges have emerged, including lack of awareness among women, insufficient training of officials, and inadequate infrastructure. Protection Officers are often overburdened, and support services such as shelters and counseling centers are limited, particularly in rural areas. Moreover, delays in judicial processes can reduce the effectiveness of the remedies provided under the Act.

Another important issue is the persistence of **patriarchal attitudes** within institutions and communities. Even with a strong legal framework, societal norms and biases can influence how cases are handled, sometimes leading to victim-blaming or pressure on women to reconcile rather than seek justice. This highlights the gap between the law's progressive intent and its real-world application.

In essence, the PWDVA, 2005, represents a transformative step in recognizing domestic violence as a serious violation of women's rights. It moves beyond a narrow legalistic approach to address the broader realities of women's lives. However, its true potential can only be realized when legal provisions are supported by effective implementation, institutional commitment, and broader social change.

6 | IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

While the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, provides a comprehensive and progressive legal framework, its effectiveness in practice is shaped by multiple structural, institutional, and socio-cultural challenges. The gap between the law "on paper" and its implementation "on the ground" remains one of the most significant concerns in addressing domestic violence in India.

One of the foremost challenges is the **lack of awareness** among women about their rights under the Act. Many women, especially in rural and marginalized communities, are either unaware of the existence of the PWDVA or do not fully understand the remedies available to them. Even when they are aware, social conditioning often leads them to perceive domestic violence as a private matter or a normal part of marital life. This lack of awareness limits the utilization of legal provisions and prevents timely intervention.

Closely linked to this is the issue of **deeply entrenched patriarchal norms**. Social expectations surrounding marriage, family honor, and gender roles often discourage women from reporting abuse. Women are frequently expected to tolerate violence in order to preserve family unity, and those who speak out may face stigma, social exclusion, or pressure from family members to reconcile. These cultural barriers significantly undermine the effectiveness of legal protections.

Another critical challenge lies in **institutional weaknesses**. The implementation of the PWDVA depends heavily on the functioning of Protection Officers, police personnel, and judicial authorities. However, in many cases, Protection Officers are overburdened, undertrained, and lack adequate resources to perform their duties effectively. Similarly, law enforcement agencies may not always respond sensitively to complaints, sometimes trivializing cases or encouraging informal settlements rather than legal action. Delays in court proceedings further discourage survivors, as the process can be time-consuming, emotionally draining, and uncertain.

The **lack of adequate infrastructure and support services** also poses a major barrier. The Act envisions a network of service providers, including shelter homes, counseling centers, and medical facilities. In reality, such services are often insufficient, unevenly distributed, or poorly coordinated. In many rural areas, these facilities are either unavailable or inaccessible, leaving women with limited options for immediate safety and support.

Economic dependency is another significant factor that constrains women's ability to seek justice. Many women rely financially on their abusers, making it difficult for them to leave abusive relationships or pursue legal remedies. Although the PWDVA provides for monetary relief, delays in obtaining such support and the lack of enforcement mechanisms can reduce its practical impact. Without financial independence, legal rights alone may not translate into real empowerment.

Additionally, there are **gaps in coordination between different stakeholders** involved in implementation. Effective enforcement of the Act requires collaboration between the judiciary, police, Protection Officers, healthcare providers, and non-governmental organizations. However, in practice, this coordination is often weak, leading to fragmented responses and delays in providing assistance.

Finally, **intersectional inequalities** further complicate implementation. Women from marginalized backgrounds—such as those belonging to lower socio-economic groups, minority communities, or remote regions—face additional barriers in accessing justice. Language differences, lack of documentation, and discrimination within institutions can all hinder their ability to seek help.

In sum, the challenges in implementing the PWDVA highlight that legal reform alone is not sufficient. The persistence of domestic violence reflects broader social and institutional realities that must be addressed alongside legal mechanisms. Overcoming these challenges requires not only stronger implementation but also sustained efforts to transform societal attitudes, strengthen institutions, and empower women at multiple levels.

7 | CASE STUDY: ASSAM

Assam provides a significant regional context for understanding the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, as it reflects a complex interplay of socio-cultural practices, economic conditions, and institutional capacities. While the legal framework of the Act applies uniformly across India, its effectiveness varies considerably depending on local realities. In Assam, these variations are particularly visible due to its diverse social composition, rural predominance, and infrastructural challenges.

One of the key factors influencing the implementation of the PWDVA in Assam is the **socio-cultural environment**. Although Assamese society is often perceived as relatively more gender-inclusive compared to some other regions of India, patriarchal norms continue to shape household dynamics. Women are still expected to conform to traditional roles centred around caregiving, obedience, and family preservation. As a result, domestic violence is frequently normalized or minimized, and reporting such incidents is often discouraged. Social stigma and concerns about family honour further prevent women from seeking legal recourse.

The **rural-urban divide** is another critical dimension. A large proportion of Assam's population resides in rural areas, where access to legal institutions, awareness programs, and support services is limited. In urban centers like Guwahati, women may have relatively better access to legal aid, NGOs, and counselling services. However, in rural and remote areas, geographical isolation, poor infrastructure, and lack of transportation create significant barriers. Women in these areas often depend on informal community mechanisms rather than formal legal processes, which may not always ensure justice or protection.

Institutional capacity in Assam also poses challenges to the effective implementation of the Act. The role of **Protection Officers**, who are central to the functioning of the PWDVA, is often constrained by limited resources, excessive workload, and lack of specialized training. In many cases, a single officer is responsible for multiple districts or large populations, making it difficult to provide timely assistance. Similarly, the availability of **shelter homes, medical facilities, and counselling services** remains inadequate, particularly outside major urban areas. This lack of institutional support weakens the protective framework envisioned under the Act.

Another important aspect is the **intersection of gender with other social factors** such as ethnicity, class, and location. Assam is home to diverse ethnic communities, each with its own customs and social norms. Women from marginalized or economically weaker sections often face compounded disadvantages, including limited education, financial dependency, and reduced access to information. These factors not only increase their vulnerability to domestic violence but also restrict their ability to seek help. In some cases, linguistic and cultural differences further complicate interaction with formal legal institutions.

At the same time, there have been **positive developments** in the region. Non-governmental organizations, women's groups, and community-based initiatives have played an important role in raising awareness and supporting survivors. Efforts by civil society have helped bring the issue of domestic violence into public discourse, encouraging more women to speak out. However, these efforts are often localized and require stronger support and coordination with state institutions to create a broader impact.

Overall, the case of Assam illustrates that the implementation of the PWDVA is deeply influenced by local contexts. While the law provides a strong framework, its effectiveness depends on how well it is integrated with social realities, institutional structures, and community practices. Addressing domestic violence in Assam, therefore, requires not only legal enforcement but also

sustained efforts to improve awareness, strengthen infrastructure, and challenge deeply rooted social norms.

8 | DISCUSSION

The analysis of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005, reveals a critical tension between progressive legal intent and complex social realities. While the Act represents a significant advancement in recognizing and addressing domestic violence, its implementation highlights the limitations of law when it operates within deeply entrenched structures of inequality. This discussion brings together the key insights of the study to reflect on why this gap persists and what it signifies for the broader pursuit of gender justice in India.

At one level, the PWDVA demonstrates how law can be used as a tool for social transformation. Its expansive definition of domestic violence and emphasis on civil remedies reflect a shift toward a more inclusive and survivor-centric understanding of justice. However, the persistence of domestic violence, as indicated by empirical data, suggests that legal reform alone cannot dismantle the structural foundations of gender-based violence. The problem lies not only in the absence of enforcement but in the **social acceptance and normalization of violence**. Many forms of abuse continue to be perceived as part of everyday marital life, which reduces both reporting and intervention.

The theoretical framework adopted in this study helps to explain this disconnect. Feminist theory highlights how patriarchy structures power relations within the household, making violence a mechanism of control rather than an exception. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence further explains how such control becomes internalized, leading women to accept or rationalize abusive behavior. Similarly, Foucault's notion of disciplinary power shows how social norms regulate women's conduct, often discouraging resistance. Together, these perspectives suggest that domestic violence is sustained not just by individual actions but by a broader system of beliefs and practices.

Another important issue that emerges is the **institutional dimension of implementation**. The effectiveness of the PWDVA depends heavily on the responsiveness of state actors, including police, Protection Officers, and the judiciary. However, institutional weaknesses—such as lack of training, inadequate resources, and procedural delays—undermine the law's potential. In some cases, institutional actors themselves may hold patriarchal attitudes, which can influence how cases are handled. This reflects a deeper problem: institutions are not neutral spaces but are shaped by the same social norms that the law seeks to challenge.

The discussion also highlights the importance of **intersectionality** in understanding domestic violence. Women's experiences are not uniform, and factors such as class, caste, ethnicity, and location significantly shape their vulnerability and access to justice. The case study of Assam illustrates how regional contexts, infrastructural limitations, and cultural practices influence the implementation of the Act. Women in rural or marginalized communities often face multiple barriers, making legal remedies less accessible and less effective.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that the PWDVA has created new spaces for dialogue and intervention. It has contributed to greater visibility of domestic violence as a public issue and has encouraged the involvement of civil society organizations. These developments indicate that while the law may not have fully achieved its transformative goals, it has initiated important shifts in awareness and discourse.

In conclusion, the discussion underscores that addressing domestic violence requires a **multi-layered approach**. Legal frameworks like the PWDVA are essential but insufficient on their own. They must be supported by institutional reform, social awareness, and efforts to challenge deeply rooted gender norms. Only by addressing both the structural and cultural dimensions of violence can the promise of the law be translated into meaningful change in women's lives.

9 | CONCLUSION

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, marks an important step in acknowledging domestic violence as a serious violation of women's rights and dignity. It offers a comprehensive and survivor-oriented legal framework that goes beyond punishment to focus on protection and support. However, as this study shows, the existence of a strong law does not automatically ensure justice in practice.

Domestic violence in India continues to persist because it is deeply rooted in patriarchal values, social norms, and economic dependencies that shape everyday life. The gap between legal provisions and lived realities reflects not only weaknesses in implementation but also broader structural inequalities. Factors such as lack of awareness, institutional limitations, and intersectional disadvantages further restrict women's access to justice.

Therefore, addressing domestic violence requires more than legal reform. It calls for a holistic approach that combines effective implementation with social transformation, gender sensitization, and economic empowerment. Only when laws are supported by changes in attitudes, institutions, and opportunities can they truly make a difference. In this sense, the PWDVA should be seen not as a final solution, but as an important step in an ongoing journey toward gender equality and justice.

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RELEVANCE OF PREMCHAND IN THE POST-PREMCHAND ERA

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Papari Deka

Independent Researcher, Kahilipara, Guwahati

Abstract

This research paper examines the enduring relevance of Premchand's ideals in the post-Premchand era (post-1936) with special focus on post-independence Hindi novels). It analyses how novelists of this period, influenced by Premchand's commitment to realism, truth-based literature, and human dignity, depicted the transformed yet persistent women-centred problems in Indian society. While external social conditions changed significantly after independence (through education, industrialization, and new ideologies) women continued to face internal psychological conflicts, economic dependence, marital discord, dowry, widowhood issues, and exploitation, often in new forms. Drawing on psychoanalytic influences (Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler) and Marxist thought, post-Premchand novelists shifted emphasis from purely social conflict to the individual psyche, yet they upheld Premchand's vision of literature as a tool for social awakening and reform. Through textual analysis of selected novels, the study demonstrates that Premchand's five key efforts such as women's education and economic self-reliance, personal independence, change in women's mindset, societal attitude transformation, and amplification of women's rebellious voice remained central. The paper concludes that Premchand's foresight makes his work profoundly relevant even today, as women's struggles persist despite surface-level progress.

Key words: Premchand, Post-Premchand Era, Women Empowerment, Psychological Realism, Social Reform.

1 | INTRODUCTION

The post-Premchand era witnessed profound shifts in India's social fabric, especially after independence, yet many women-centred issues endured in subtler, more complex forms. While Premchand's contemporaries focused primarily on external societal conflicts such

as child marriage, dowry, widowhood, and caste-based restrictions—post-1936 novelists increasingly explored the internal psychological landscapes of women. Influenced by Freudian and Adlerian psychoanalysis, they delved into the female psyche, foregrounding individual dilemmas over collective social critique. At the same time, these writers remained deeply indebted to Premchand's realist ethos and reformist zeal, insisting that literature must confront and eradicate persistent evils.

Issues such as marital discord, economic dependence, and exploitation did not vanish; instead, they evolved. Women's growing access to education and employment fostered greater self-awareness and assertiveness, yet true equality remained elusive. Novelists portrayed educated, economically active women who still grappled with patriarchal suspicion, domestic unrest, and subtle forms of exploitation in professional spheres. Post-independence optimism (that legislative reforms, industrial growth, and expanded schooling would swiftly diminish gender-based atrocities) proved only partially fulfilled. Problems mutated: dowry assumed disguised commercial guises, marital discord intensified amid materialistic pressures, and psychological isolation replaced over the purdah restrictions (gender segregation).

Statistical overview of Kirti Mishra (2002) captures the era's uneven progress: female literacy surged from roughly 2,054 in 1942 to over 79 million by the 1981 census, with girls entering medicine, home science, and professional fields in unprecedented numbers. Child marriage and purdah receded, yet novels reveal that economic self-reliance often exposed women to new workplace harassment and emotional alienation. The central research problem, therefore, is to trace how women-centred concerns transformed in post-Premchand Hindi fiction and to measure the depth of Premchand's continuing influence on novelists who sought both psychological realism and social awakening.

2 | REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Scholarship on post-Premchand Hindi fiction underscores a decisive turn toward psychological realism and individualism. Kirti Mishra (2002) charts the dramatic expansion of women's education and the near-disappearance of child marriage and purdah after independence. Nidhi Saxena (2002) highlights the persistent gap between women's educational attainments and their actual enjoyment of equal rights. Bindu Agrawal (1967) observes that novelists raised probing questions about the failures of romantic love without proposing definitive remedies. Gupta (1986) examines portrayals of modern discontent, despair, and intricate interpersonal dilemmas in post-independence novels.

Monographic studies of key authors such as Ilachand Joshi, Jainendra Kumar, Yashpal, Mannu Bhandari, Krishna Sobti, and Mridula Garg repeatedly credit Premchand with shaping their commitment to realistic social depiction and women's empowerment. Yet no single study has systematically compared Premchand's five core efforts (women's education and economic self-reliance, personal independence, mindset transformation, societal attitudinal change, and amplification of women's rebellious voice) across a broad corpus of post-Premchand novels. The present research bridges this gap by undertaking a comparative textual analysis anchored in Premchand's stated ideals and the socio-economic realities of independent India.

3 | OBJECTIVES

The study has the following objectives:

1. To examine the changed forms of women-centred social problems in post-Premchand-era Hindi novels.
2. To assess the influence of Premchand's literary ideals on the portrayal of these problems.
3. To analyse how novelists depicted Premchand's five key efforts—women's education and economic self-reliance, personal independence, change in women's mindset and perspective, transformation in society's attitude toward women, and amplification of women's rebellious voice.
4. To evaluate the extent to which post-independence novels reflect Premchand's vision of literature as a vehicle for social reform and human awakening.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The research adopts a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach rooted in literary criticism. Primary sources comprise selected Hindi novels from the post-Premchand period (approximately 1937–1980s) by authors such as Ilachand Joshi, Jainendra Kumar, Yashpal, Dharmvir Bharati, Mannu Bhandari, Krishna Sobti, Mridula Garg, Shashiprabha Shastri, and others. Textual evidence (character portrayal, dialogue, narrative description, and thematic development) is analysed to trace women-centred problems and Premchand's influence. Secondary sources include critical works by Kirti Mishra, Nidhi Saxena, Bindu Agrawal, and others. The method involves close reading, comparative analysis with Premchand's stated ideals, and contextualisation within post-independence socio-economic changes. Quotations are translated into English for accessibility while retaining original meaning. The study is limited to representative novels that explicitly engage with the themes of education, economic independence, marital life, and women's agency.

5 | DISCUSSION

Key Arguments Illustrating Premchand's Relevance in the Post-Premchand Era:

5.1 Portrayal of Society's Real Problems in Novels and Indication of the Path of Reform: Post-Premchand novelists faithfully upheld Premchand's tradition of unflinching realism, exposing societal ills while gesturing toward reform. Prostitution, for instance, persisted but appeared in altered guises. Earlier writers had exhaustively examined its roots and remedies; later novelists therefore focused less on causation and more on its continued presence as a marker of economic desperation. Even as education reduced its incidence, financial hardship still drove some women into the trade. Crucially, these characters no longer sought solitary escape; they aspired to collective liberation, reflecting a broader social consciousness.

In Ilachand Joshi's *Prem Aur Chhaya*, Nandini articulates the systemic conspiracy trapping courtesans: "You all together have created such a conspiracy that no matter how much I struggle... I remain only a courtesan of courtesans" (Joshi, 1947, p. 303). Similar collective awareness emerges in portrayals of marital discord. Novelists catalogued tensions arising from unwanted marriages, lingering pre-marital attachments, suspicion, economic strain, and extra-marital attractions. Jainendra Kumar's *Tyagpatra* illustrates a woman's unresolved love for a former suitor after an arranged marriage; Mrinal's suppressed emotions and torn letter dramatise the conflict between personal desire and social propriety. Parallel situations recur in Dharmvir Bharati's *Gunahon Ka Devta*, Joshi's *Sanyasi*, and Agyeya's *Shekhar: Ek Jeevani*.

Yashpal's *Dada Comrade* captures spousal suspicion when Amarnath accuses Yashoda, who retorts: "Men always have distrust towards women... If someone raises a finger or makes up stories, what can be done about it?" (Pal, 1944, p. 156). Through such episodes, novelists underscored that marital harmony demands mutual respect, affection, and emotional surrender. They also acknowledged the double-edged nature of personality development: greater autonomy sometimes led to ethical lapses, yet the same growth pointed toward healthier conjugal relations rooted in love.

Dowry remained a stubborn scourge. Shashiprabha Shastri's *Naveen* and *Kyonki* expose its commercial logic that families treating sons' education as an investment to be recouped with interest and the consequent torture of brides who bring insufficient gifts. Even Mannu Bhandari's *Swami* satirises the transactional bargaining that reduced marriage to a contract. Protest, once overt in Premchand's time, continued through literature, yet the practice merely adopted sophisticated disguises.

Economic exploitation of the middle class by capitalist forces formed another recurrent theme. Set predominantly in middle-class milieus, novels vividly depicted women's acute experience of deprivation, since household financial management fell largely to them. Working women frequently endured physical and mental harassment to secure employment. Mridula Garg's *Chittkobra* invokes Marxist analysis to explain how capitalism and mechanisation render worker rebellion inevitable. Post-independence fiction thus continued Premchand's dual project: documenting harsh realities while outlining pathways such as education, solidarity, and collective resistance toward reform.

5.2 Women's Education and Economic Self-Reliance: Premchand's insistence on female education as the cornerstone of empowerment echoes powerfully across post-Premchand novels. Writers portrayed women of every class pursuing schooling, viewing it both as a route to advantageous marriages and, more importantly, as a means of self-reliance. Yashpal's *Desh Drohi*, *Dada Comrade*, and *Party Comrade* feature highly educated heroines; Jamuna's post-M.A. teaching career exemplifies financial autonomy earned through relentless effort (Pal, 1958, p. 189). Ilachand Joshi's *Nirvasit* shows Rama securing urban school employment, while Rameshwar Shukla's *Jalti Dhoop* celebrates Mamta's professional competence.

College-educated figures abound—Rani, Leela, and Indira in Rangeya Raghav's *Gharonda*; Kalyani, a London-trained doctor in Jainendra Kumar's *Kalyani*; Geeta the research scholar and Manorama the M.A. student in Yashpal's works. Education equipped women with courage to challenge injustice, though full parity with men remained distant. Nidhi Saxena notes the persistent gap: "No matter how much Indian women study... they still do not get the rights that a free man gets" (Saxena, 2002, p. 106).

Economic independence, however, exacted heavy costs. Novels such as *Dahakne Ke Paar*, *Naveen*, *Kauraja*, and *Panchpan Khambhe Lal Deewaren* depict working women facing official harassment. Nirupama Sewati's *Pati Ke Ghar Ki Awaaz* records a father granting his daughter employment freedom to support the household, yet the arrangement remains precarious. Usha Priyambada's *Panchpan Khambhe Lal Deewaren* reveals Sushma, a college professor, shouldering both professional and domestic burdens while feeling emotionally sidelined at home.

From the 1960s onward, women novelists foregrounded economic realities with stark clarity. Mridula Garg's Marxist lens in *Chittkobra* underscores money's decisive role in power relations. Urban settings amplified relational strains: dual-income households

eroded traditional male authority, sometimes fostering triangular emotional dynamics that Uma Shukla aptly termed “stuck relationships” (Shukla, 1994, p. 40). Rural novels recorded comparatively fewer fissures. Ultimately, education and earning capacity awakened women’s consciousness, enabling them to demand equal rights which are a clear evidence of Premchand’s enduring literary legacy.

5.3 Women’s Personal Independence: Premchand viewed personal independence as the vital first step in women’s inner development, requiring education, awareness, and self-reliance. Post-Premchand novelists endorsed this vision, extending it to widowhood, prostitution, and political participation. Earlier, widows endured economic dependence and social ostracism; later fiction showed them questioning why widowers could remarry while they could not. Educated widows increasingly asserted their right to dignified remarriage, though novelists stopped short of endorsing remarriage for mothers whose primary duty remained child-rearing.

Prostitution scenes echo Premchand’s era but acquire new psychological nuance. In *Tyagpatra*, Mrinal, cast out by her husband, enters a brothel yet refuses individual rescue, insisting, “Even if I do not stay in this room, someone else will stay” (Kumar, 1937, p. 176). Her stance reveals both self-awareness and collective solidarity. Comparable sympathetic portrayals appear in Joshi’s *Prem Aur Chhaya*, Raghav’s *Gharonda*, and Agyeya’s *Shekhar*.

Economic independence emerges as the prerequisite for genuine personal freedom. Shanti in *Sanyasi* and Jamuna in *Desh Drohi* teach; Kalyani becomes a doctor. Novelists argued that only financial autonomy shields women from familial neglect and widowhood’s degradation. Kirti Mishra documents rising female political engagement, once deemed unrespectable (Mishra, 2002, p. 127). Maitreyi Pushpa’s *Chak*, Sewati’s *Dahakne Ke Paar*, and Bhandari’s *Maha Bhoj* depict women entering politics on equal footing with men. Thus, personal independence evolved from an abstract ideal into a lived, multifaceted reality.

5.4 Change in Woman’s Mind and Perspective Premchand championed selfless, sacrificial love untainted by lust or marriage calculations. Post-Premchand writers, by contrast, legitimised pre-marital romance, lust, and even multiple relationships within limits. Sunanda’s unrequited physical longing in Joshi’s *Mukti Path*, Shaile’s deliberate multiplicity of lovers in Yashpal’s *Dada Comrade* (“I wanted to expand my life through the stream of love”), and support for inter-caste unions in Shukla’s *Nayi Imarat* illustrate this shift. Bindu Agrawal rightly notes the absence of clear solutions to love’s psychological distortions (Agrawal, 1967, p. 183).

Post-Second World War disillusionment and psychoanalytic currents intensified focus on inner turmoil. Nirupama Sewati, Krishna Sobti, Usha Priyambada, and Mridula Garg excelled at rendering loneliness, repression, and ego clashes. Mannu Bhandari’s *Aapka Bunti* dissects Shakun’s ego-driven marital collapse: “the prick of not being able to defeat Ajay... keeps burning her” (Bhandari, 2021, pp. 38-39). Sobti’s *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* and *Dhar Se Bichhudi* portray mentally fractured women confronting despair and social detachment. Gupta (1986) observes that post-independence fiction captured modern life’s “dissatisfaction, despair, intolerance, conflict, and the most complex situations” (p. 7). The heroine’s self-dialogue in *Dhar Se Bichhudi* “once the foot slips, life will mix with dust” (Sobti, 2014, p. 101)—epitomises this introspective turn. Women novelists thus supplied nuanced psychological realism absent in earlier social realism.

5.5 Change in Society's Perspective Towards Women: Premchand insisted society must recognise women's feelings and grant them opportunities, or women must demand them. Post-Premchand fiction registers noticeable softening of attitudes, especially toward widows. Joshi's *Mukti Path* shows Pramila defending Sunanda's right to desire: "Does a widow not have a mind?" (Joshi, 1951, p. 224). Yet writers still prioritised maternal duty over remarriage for widows with children.

Divorce gained cautious acceptance when marital love evaporated. Yashpal's *Manushya Ke Roop* endorses it as preferable to slow emotional death; Neeta celebrates Manorama's liberation. Women rarely initiate divorce, citing cultural hesitation, yet they experience relief afterward. Joint-family erosion appears in Ashk's *Girti Deewaren* and Tiwari's *Kamala*, where intergenerational clashes over women's education and mobility fracture traditional structures. Novelists advocated harmony rather than abolition of the joint family.

Ultra-modern influences and scientific rationalism further strained spousal devotion and chastity norms. Third-party intrusions and redefined love produced triangular tensions and rising divorce rates. Writers portrayed these shifts empathetically, analysing identity crises without endorsing anarchy.

5.6 Women's Rebellious Voice: While championing independence, novelists cautioned against anarchy. Heroines increasingly refuse silent suffering. Sunanda flees an elderly husband in *Mukti Path*; Arati rejects an unwanted match in *Nayi Imarat*. Shaile's counsel to Yashoda in *Dada Comrade* encapsulates the new assertiveness: women must cultivate courage and force men to accept female personality. Bhandari's *Aapka Bunti* and Dipti Khandelwal's *Kohre* explore post-divorce trauma; Shakun laments, "there is no satisfaction in reaching; there is a helpless cry" (Bhandari, 2021, p. 38).

Widow portrayals evolved: Kusum Ansal's *Uski Panchvati* demands equal remarriage rights; Shastri's *Amaltas* shows Bela rejecting mourning rituals to embrace life. Government initiatives such as Special Marriage Act (1954), adult education programmes, and Five-Year Plan emphases on literacy, economic independence, and health which find reflection in fiction. Women's public participation surged, yet patriarchal mindsets endured, merely cloaked in modern rhetoric. Economic self-reliance exposed women to workplace exploitation, while Western influences bred new psychological afflictions. Premchand's foresight that literature would awaken rebellious voices—remains the ultimate proof of his timeless relevance, as women's struggle to remain part of society continues unchanged in essence across eras.

6. FINDINGS

Premchand's Enduring Relevance: Key Insights from Post-Premchand Novels

1. Post-Premchand novelists faithfully sustained Premchand's social realism while successfully layering it with psychological depth and interiority (Gupta, 1986; Saxena, 2002).
2. Women's education and economic self-reliance consistently emerge as the foundational bedrock of empowerment, directly echoing Premchand's five key efforts across the selected novels (Mishra, 2002; Saxena, 2002; Pal, 1958).
3. Traditional problems such as dowry, marital discord, prostitution, and widowhood persist in the post-Premchand era, though they appear in modernised and psychologically nuanced forms (Shastri, 1978; Shastri, 1980; Bhandari, 1982; Joshi, 1947).

4. Greater emphasis is placed on individual consciousness and internal psychic conflict rather than purely external social critique, marking a clear evolution within Premchand's realist framework (Gupta, 1986; Bhandari, 2021; Sobti, 2014).
5. Strong advocacy for love marriage, inter-caste unions, and women's right to rebel against oppression clearly demonstrates Premchand's unmistakable and enduring imprint on later Hindi fiction (Kumar, 1937; Pal, 1944; Agrawal, 1967).
6. Significant legislative and educational gains after independence coexist with entrenched patriarchal attitudes and new forms of subtle exploitation, thereby validating Premchand's prophetic vision of persistent gender inequality (Mishra, 2002; Garg, 1975).
7. Marxist and psychoanalytic strands enrich the narrative texture without displacing Premchand's humanist core, confirming that his commitment to truth, humanity, and social reform remains the central guiding force (Garg, 1975; Gupta, 1986).

These seven findings collectively establish that Premchand's literary ideals and social vision did not diminish in the post-Premchand era; rather, they continued to shape the thematic and ideological foundation of Hindi novels, proving his timeless relevance in addressing women-centred issues.

7 | CONCLUSION

Premchand's relevance in the post-Premchand era remains undiminished and, in many ways, has grown stronger with time. His vision of literature as truthful, humane, and reform-oriented guided an entire generation of novelists who, while adapting to new psychological and economic realities, upheld his commitment to women's dignity and equality. The problems he identified (such as lack of education, economic dependence, social conservatism) did not disappear after independence; they merely changed form. Yet the novels also record genuine progress: rising literacy, economic participation, and women's willingness to raise their voices. Premchand had foreseen that literature could awaken both present and future generations. The post-Premchand novelists proved him right by using his ideals as the foundation for their own critiques and solutions. In an era still grappling with gender inequality, domestic violence, and patriarchal mindsets, Premchand's works and the literature they inspired continue to offer both diagnosis and direction. True empowerment, the novels collectively suggest, lies in combining economic independence with inner strength and societal change—precisely the path Premchand charted decades earlier. His legacy is not merely historical; it remains a living force for social transformation. Even today, when new forms of exploitation emerge, readers and writers return to Premchand for the moral clarity and social insight that no other writer has matched. His foresight, realism, and unwavering faith in literature's power to reform society make him not only relevant but indispensable in the post-Premchand era and beyond.

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SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIMENSIONS OF TRADITIONAL HEALTH PRACTICES: A CASE STUDY OF DEITHOR, KARBI ANGLONG

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Dipak Bhuyan

Assistant Professor, Government Model College, Deithor, Karbi Anglong, Assam

Abstract

This article explores the intersection of traditional medicine and socio-economic structures in Deithor, a region within the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, India. Despite the expansion of biomedical infrastructure, traditional health practices (THP) remain a primary or complementary source of healthcare for the Karbi community. This study examines how economic status, geographic isolation, and cultural identity shape healthcare-seeking behaviour. Research indicates that THPs in Deithor are not merely "alternatives" born of necessity, but are deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric, governed by a unique local economy of herbalism and ritual healing. Furthermore, it investigates the significant, yet complex, potential for sustainable microenterprise development based on Karbi ethno-medicinal knowledge. The analysis highlights critical challenges such as knowledge erosion, biopiracy, and regulatory gaps, while proposing recommendations for formal recognition, ethical commercialisation, and community empowerment to ensure the preservation and equitable utilisation of this invaluable cultural heritage.

Keywords: Karbi, Traditional Health Practices, Ethnomedicine, Community Health, Microenterprise, Intellectual Property, Northeast India

1 | INTRODUCTION

Cultural Significance and Rich Heritage

The Karbi people, a prominent indigenous tribe inhabiting Northeast India, possess a profound and extensive repository of traditional medical knowledge (TEK) that has been meticulously passed down through countless generations. This intricate body of knowledge is not merely a collection of remedies; it is deeply interwoven with their distinctive traditions, cultural practices, and animistic religious beliefs. For the Karbis, traditional medicine transcends a purely clinical function; it represents an integral facet of

their spiritual and cultural identity, embodying a holistic worldview that views health as intrinsically linked to their environment, community, and ancestral spirits. The enduring presence of Karbi ethnomedicine, even amidst the pressures of modernisation and cultural assimilation, underscores its deep cultural roots and the community's profound reliance on these time-honoured practices. This resilience is a fundamental attribute that must be acknowledged and leveraged in any contemporary development initiative aimed at supporting the Karbi people.

The Karbi People and Karbi Anglong Context (including Deithor)

The Karbis constitute the predominant hill tribal population within Assam, characterised by their Mongoloid racial origins and belonging to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The region of Karbi Anglong, situated in Central Assam, is celebrated for its rich biodiversity and its vibrant heritage of traditional medicine. This unique confluence of a significant indigenous population and abundant natural resources renders Karbi Anglong a critical area for ethnobiological study and sustainable development. Within this broader context, Deithor is specifically identified as a Police Station located within the Bokajan Civil Sub-Division of Karbi Anglong, marking it as a pertinent administrative and geographical focal point for this examination. The demographic and ecological importance of the Karbis, stemming from their status as a major tribal group residing in a biodiversity-rich area, means that any interventions concerning their traditional knowledge have the potential for substantial impact on both the population and the preservation of a vital ecosystem.

Despite the advent of modern healthcare, traditional health practices remain prevalent in the Deithor area, especially in remote and rural communities. However, these practices face significant challenges due to modernisation, globalization, and the increasing availability of Western medicine. The younger generation is less inclined to follow these traditions, leading to a gradual erosion of indigenous knowledge. This article aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the traditional health practices among the Karbi community in the Deithor area, highlighting their significance, challenges, and future opportunities.

2 | OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To identify the prevailing traditional health practices and the role of practitioners in Deithor and also analyze the socio-economic factors (income, education, and accessibility) influencing the preference for traditional medicine. A particular emphasis is placed on the region of Deithor, Karbi Anglong. The overarching aim is to identify and articulate opportunities for thoughtfully integrating this invaluable traditional knowledge with modern scientific and economic approaches, all while rigorously ensuring cultural preservation, ethical considerations, and equitable benefit-sharing for the Karbi community.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The primary data were collected through fieldwork conducted in the Deithor area of Karbi Anglong district between July 2024 and September 2025. The research involved structured and unstructured interviews with traditional healers, community elders, and residents. Personal observations and participant observation were also used to gather detailed information on the practices and beliefs surrounding traditional health care.

A sample size of 50 participants was selected, representing a diverse cross-section of the community, including rural residents, males and females, and individuals from different religious backgrounds. The data were analysed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. The study also included a review of existing literature and secondary data sources to provide a broader context for the findings.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Karbi Indigenous Healing Practices: A Holistic Approach

Traditional Healing Modalities

Karbi traditional healthcare practices are collectively referred to as *seh-kelang*, a comprehensive system that integrates various therapies, charms, and intricate rituals. This multifaceted approach addresses a wide spectrum of ailments, reflecting a deep understanding of the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Herbal Medicine (Ethnobotany)

Ethnomedicinal plants form the cornerstone of Karbi traditional healing, providing accessible and often effective remedies for a diverse array of health conditions. Extensive studies conducted in Karbi Anglong have meticulously documented a remarkable 80 different ethnomedicinal plant species utilised for treating 31 distinct ailments. Further research in eight villages within the region identified 54 valuable medicinal plants spanning 35 families. The most prevalent plant forms are herbs, accounting for 48-49.19% of species, with leaves being the most frequently used plant part (49.19-74%), often prepared as decoctions (61.21%) or by extracting their juice (Das, S., 2018).

Several key medicinal plants have been identified for their significant traditional use. *Azadirachta indica* (Neem) consistently exhibits the highest use value, indicating its widespread application and perceived efficacy. Other notable plants include *Zingiber officinale* (Ginger), *Clerodendrum glandulosum* (traditionally used for hypertension), and *Paederia foetida* (utilised for bone fractures and sprains). Additional important species documented are *Acorus calamus*, *Centella asiatica*, *Oroxylum indicum*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Ageratum conizoides*, *Blumeopsis flava*, *Gynura cusimbua*, *Hedyotis scandens*, *Citrus medica*, *Clitoria ternatea*, *Ocimum tenuiflorum*, *Ocimum basilicum*, and *Phyllanthus acidus*. The substantial number of documented medicinal plants with specific traditional applications, coupled with the fact that over half of modern pharmaceutical drugs have their origins in

ethnomedicine, strongly indicates a significant, yet largely untapped, potential for new drug discovery and development from the rich Karbi flora. This represents a considerable scientific and economic opportunity (Krepublishers, 2025).

Mineral-based Treatments:

In addition to plant and animal resources, minerals are also incorporated into Karbi healing practices for certain ailments. These mineral-based treatments are often administered in conjunction with plant or animal products, or as part of magico-religious performances, highlighting the integrated nature of their therapeutic approaches.

Magico-Religious Practices:

Magico-religious practices are deeply ingrained in the Karbi healing system. These include incantations, known as *kapherem*, used for treating minor ailments such as boils, dog bites, acute gastroenteritis, and burns. For more severe conditions, rituals like blood-sacrifice (

seh karkli) are performed, involving divination through the examination of entrails and liver (haruspicy or hepatomancy) to predict patient recovery. The Karbis hold a fundamental belief that malevolent spirits can cause illness and that it can be alleviated by appeasing benevolent spirits. This belief system extends to their reverence for natural elements such as hills, mountains, and rivers, as well as their worship of household deities (*Hem Angtar*). The profound magico-religious dimension of Karbi healing presents a notable challenge for its integration with modern, secular healthcare systems. Any successful collaborative effort must adopt a culturally sensitive approach that respects these deeply held beliefs, rather than dismissing them, to ensure effective engagement and positive health outcomes.

Role of Traditional Healers

Traditional healers, including figures such as the *kurusar* (priest) and wise men, are highly respected and widely accepted as experts within the Karbi communities. They possess extensive knowledge in diagnosis, the preparation and administration of traditional medicines, and the overall healing process. These healers often function as medico-religious practitioners, fulfilling roles such as exorcists, magicians, or mantric witches, who are central to conducting healing rituals and administering treatments. Their knowledge is primarily generational, passed down orally from one generation to the next, a characteristic that underscores the vulnerability of this intangible cultural heritage to loss if not systematically documented and preserved. Given their significant community acceptance and their indispensable role in local healthcare, traditional healers are critical stakeholders for any health or economic development initiatives within the Karbi community. Their active involvement is essential for building community trust, ensuring cultural appropriateness of interventions, and facilitating effective knowledge transfer.

Challenges

Despite the richness and effectiveness of traditional health practices, the Karbi community faces several challenges in preserving and promoting these systems. Modernisation and globalisation have led to a decline in the use of traditional remedies, as

younger generations are more inclined to seek modern medical treatment. The availability of Western medicine and healthcare facilities has further reduced the reliance on traditional practices.

Another challenge is the loss of indigenous knowledge. As traditional healers age and pass away, the knowledge of medicinal plants and healing rituals is at risk of being lost. The younger generation is less interested in learning these practices, leading to a gradual erosion of cultural heritage. Environmental degradation and deforestation also pose a threat to traditional health practices. The loss of biodiversity and the destruction of natural habitats reduce the availability of medicinal plants and other resources essential for traditional healing.

Future Opportunities

Despite these challenges, there are several opportunities for the preservation and promotion of traditional health practices among the Karbi community. One key opportunity is the integration of traditional and modern healthcare systems. By combining the strengths of both systems, it is possible to provide more comprehensive and culturally sensitive healthcare services.

Another opportunity is the documentation and digitisation of indigenous knowledge. By recording and archiving the knowledge of traditional healers and community elders, it is possible to preserve this valuable cultural heritage for future generations. This can be achieved through the creation of databases, digital libraries, and educational programs.

Community-based initiatives and awareness campaigns can also play a crucial role in promoting traditional health practices. By engaging the community in the preservation and promotion of these practices, it is possible to foster a sense of pride and ownership among the younger generation.

Karbi Anglong holds distinct potential to attract medical tourists seeking "regional alternative treatments and wellness care," leveraging its unique traditional healing systems. The region's rich handloom and handicraft culture, coupled with the emergence of homestays, suggests ample opportunities for developing cultural tourism experiences that can complement traditional health offerings.

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Healing Through Chanting (Kapherem)

In the village of Deithor, a 45-year-old woman named Rani was suffering from chronic gastritis. Despite seeking treatment from modern healthcare facilities, her condition did not improve. She then turned to a traditional healer, who performed a kapherem ritual. The healer recited holy verses and applied a concoction made from local herbs. After several sessions, Rani's symptoms improved significantly, and she reported feeling much better. This case highlights the effectiveness of traditional healing practices and the importance of cultural beliefs in the healing process.

Case Study 2: Blood Sacrifice (Seh Karkli)

In another village, a 30-year-old man named Manoj was diagnosed with a severe illness that modern medicine could not cure. His family consulted a traditional healer, who recommended a seh karkli ritual. A chicken was sacrificed, and the entrails and liver were examined to predict the effectiveness of the ritual. The healer then performed a series of chants and rituals, and Manoj's condition gradually improved. This case demonstrates the role of magico-religious rituals in the Karbi healthcare system and the importance of community support in the healing process.

5 | CONCLUSION

The case study of Deithor proves that traditional health practices are an essential component of the rural economy. They provide a low-cost, culturally resonant, and accessible alternative to the formal healthcare system. For any public health intervention in Karbi Anglong to succeed, it must respect and perhaps even integrate these traditional practitioners into the broader health network. The traditional health practices of the Karbi community in Karbi Anglong represent an invaluable cultural heritage and a vital resource for primary healthcare and economic development. These practices, deeply interwoven with their spiritual beliefs and cultural identity, offer accessible, affordable, and often highly effective treatments, particularly in remote areas where modern medical facilities are scarce. The rich ethnobotanical and ethnozoological knowledge, passed down through generations, holds significant potential for modern drug discovery, the development of value-added products, and the growth of eco-tourism and cultural immersion initiatives.

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MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AMONG ADOLESCENT LEARNERS: ROLE OF TEACHERS

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Maloy Gogoi

Assistant Professor, BRM Govt. Model College, Doomdooma

Abstract

Mental health issues among adolescents represent a significant global concern, particularly within schools where academic pressure, social challenges, and emotional changes are prevalent. This paper contends that teachers play a pivotal role in addressing adolescent mental health in educational settings. The focus is on how teachers can facilitate early identification and intervention for prevalent mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, behavioural disorders, and stress. Through a qualitative, analytical review of secondary sources such as scholarly articles, educational reports, and mental health studies, this study demonstrates that effective teacher–student relationships, timely recognition of mental health symptoms, and the integration of social and emotional learning initiatives in classrooms substantially enhance students' psychological well-being. The findings suggest that prioritizing teacher training, mental health awareness initiatives, and collaborative efforts among schools, families, and mental health professionals is crucial for addressing adolescent mental health challenges.

Keywords: adolescent mental health, depression, anxiety, teacher support, school environment, social-emotional learning

1 | INTRODUCTION

Mental health constitutes a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, shaping individuals' thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Adolescence is characterized by significant biological, psychological, and social changes that affect emotional development and identity formation (Steinberg, 2017). Although this developmental stage presents opportunities for growth and self-discovery, it simultaneously exposes adolescents to a range of mental health challenges. Recent studies indicate that mental health problems among adolescents are increasing worldwide. According to the World Health Organization, approximately one in seven adolescents aged 10–19 experiences a mental disorder, making mental health conditions a major contributor to illness and disability in this age group (World Health Organization, 2021). Depression, anxiety, and behavioural disorders are among the most common conditions affecting adolescents. Academic

pressure, social expectations, family conflicts, and technological changes have further contributed to rising levels of stress among students (American Psychological Association, 2020). Adolescents often struggle to cope with these pressures due to limited emotional maturity and insufficient psychological support. Schools represent one of the most influential environments for adolescent development because students spend a substantial amount of time in educational settings. Teachers interact with learners daily and therefore have a unique opportunity to observe behavioural and emotional changes. Consequently, teachers play an important role in identifying early signs of psychological distress and supporting students' mental well-being (Weare & Nind, 2011).

This research paper aims to examine the major mental health issues affecting adolescent learners and analyze the role teachers can play in promoting psychological well-being within educational environments.

2 | REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on adolescent mental health has increased significantly over the past two decades. Numerous studies have documented the growing prevalence of psychological disorders among adolescents. Depression is one of the most common mental health disorders among adolescents and often emerges during early teenage years. Symptoms such as persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, and reduced motivation can significantly affect students' academic performance and interpersonal relationships (Thapar et al., 2012). If untreated, depression can lead to severe consequences, including substance abuse and suicidal behaviour. Anxiety disorders are also highly prevalent among adolescents. These disorders involve excessive worry, fear, and emotional distress that interfere with daily functioning. Academic pressure and social expectations are frequently identified as key triggers for anxiety among students (American Psychological Association, 2020). Academic stress has been widely recognized as a major contributor to adolescent mental health problems. Competitive educational systems and examination-focused learning environments often create intense pressure on students to achieve high academic performance (Deb et al., 2015). This pressure can lead to emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and burnout.

Peer relationships also play a crucial role in adolescent mental health. Adolescents highly value peer acceptance and social belonging. Bullying, peer rejection, and social exclusion have been linked to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem among adolescents (Arseneault, 2018). Family environment is another significant factor affecting adolescent mental health. Supportive family relationships contribute to emotional stability, while family conflicts, neglect, or unrealistic expectations can increase psychological distress (Steinberg, 2017). Educational research also emphasizes the importance of teacher support in promoting student well-being. Positive teacher–student relationships foster emotional security, academic engagement, and self-confidence among students (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Teachers who demonstrate empathy, understanding, and effective communication can significantly reduce students' stress and anxiety.

Additionally, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs have gained attention as effective strategies for improving mental health outcomes in schools. These programs aim to develop emotional regulation, empathy, and problem-solving skills among students. Studies have shown that SEL programs improve students' social behaviour, emotional

competence, and academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Overall, existing literature highlights the importance of school-based interventions and teacher involvement in addressing adolescent mental health challenges.

3 | METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on the analysis of existing literature related to adolescent mental health and teacher involvement in educational settings. Qualitative research allows for a deeper understanding of social and psychological phenomena by analyzing previously published studies and reports (Creswell, 2014).

Sources of Data

The study relies on secondary data sources, including: Peer-reviewed academic journals, Books related to adolescent psychology and education, Reports from international organizations, educational research publications etc. These sources provide insights into the prevalence, causes, and impacts of mental health problems among adolescents.

4 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of existing literature reveals several important findings regarding adolescent mental health and the role of teachers.

Prevalence of Mental Health Issues:

Research indicates that mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and stress are increasingly common among adolescent learners (World Health Organization, 2021). Many students experience emotional difficulties that affect their academic performance and social relationships.

Academic Pressure as a Major Stressor:

Academic expectations and examination pressure are among the primary sources of stress for adolescents. Students often experience fear of failure and intense competition, which contribute to anxiety and emotional distress (Deb et al., 2015).

Influence of Social and Environmental Factors:

Family conflicts, peer pressure, bullying, and excessive use of digital technology are significant contributors to psychological distress among adolescents (Arseneault, 2018).

Importance of Teacher Support:

Teachers play an important role in identifying mental health problems and providing emotional support. Studies show that students who feel supported by teachers

demonstrate higher levels of well-being and academic engagement (Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Need for Mental Health Education:

Schools that implement mental health awareness programs and social-emotional learning initiatives are more effective in promoting positive student development (Durlak et al., 2011).

5 | DISCUSSION

The findings highlight the complex nature of mental health challenges faced by adolescent learners. Adolescents are exposed to multiple stressors that influence their emotional well-being and academic success. Teachers play a critical role in addressing these challenges because they interact with students regularly and can observe behavioural and emotional changes. A teacher who understands the psychological needs of adolescents can create a classroom environment that promotes emotional safety and mutual respect (Weare & Nind, 2011). One of the most important responsibilities of teachers is the early identification of mental health problems. Behavioural indicators such as withdrawal, sudden decline in academic performance, and lack of concentration may signal emotional distress. Early identification allows teachers to provide initial support and guide students toward professional help when necessary (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Another important aspect is creating a supportive classroom environment. Students who feel respected and valued are more likely to communicate their concerns and seek assistance. Teachers can foster such environments by encouraging open dialogue, promoting cooperation, and reducing unnecessary academic pressure. The integration of social and emotional learning programs within school curricula also plays a crucial role in improving adolescent mental health. These programs help students develop emotional intelligence, resilience, and coping skills that enable them to manage stress effectively (Durlak et al., 2011). However, teachers often face challenges in addressing mental health issues due to limited training and resources. Many educators report feeling unprepared to manage students' psychological problems effectively. Therefore, professional development programs focused on mental health education are necessary. Collaboration between teachers, parents, school counsellors, and mental health professionals is also essential. A coordinated approach ensures that adolescents receive appropriate support both inside and outside the classroom.

6 | CONCLUSION

Mental health issues among adolescent learners represent a growing challenge for modern education systems. Adolescents face numerous psychological pressures related to academic expectations, peer relationships, family environments, and technological influences. These challenges can significantly affect their emotional well-being and academic achievement. Teachers play a vital role in promoting adolescent mental health by identifying early signs of distress, creating supportive learning environments, and guiding students toward appropriate support systems. Schools must therefore prioritize teacher training, mental health awareness programs, and the integration of social-emotional learning into educational curricula. Effective collaboration between teachers,

parents, and mental health professionals is essential for addressing adolescent mental health challenges. By fostering positive teacher–student relationships and promoting emotional resilience, schools can help adolescents overcome mental health difficulties and achieve their full developmental potential.

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NEGOTIATING MARGINALIZATION AND DALIT IDENTITY IN INDIAN ENGLISH FICTION: A STUDY OF 'UNTOUCHABLE' BY MULK RAJ ANAND

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Naincy Singh

Research Scholar, Department of English, B.R. Ambedkar Bihar University, Muzaffarpur

Abstract

Indian English fiction has played an important role in articulating the lived realities of the marginalized communities, mainly Dalits, who had been excluded historically from dominant literary and social discourses. Mulk Raj Anand's '*Untouchable*' stands as one of the earliest and most powerful fictional articulations of casteist oppression that has been waged in the modern Indian literature. This paper analyses how the novel negotiates marginalization and Dalit identity through its portrayal of Bakha-a young sweeper whose single day becomes emblematic of centuries of social exclusion. The paper draws on postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and Dalit discourse to engage with the narrative strategies, thematic concerns, and ideological positioning in Anand's '*Untouchable*'. While recognizing the limitations of Anand's positionality as a non-Dalit writer, this paper argues that *Untouchable* remains one of the foundational texts in the canon of Indian English fiction that portray caste oppression and institutes a literary space for Dalit subjectivity. Through close textual analysis and critical engagement with existing scholarship, this research therefore analyzes the novel's enduring relevance in discussions associated with caste, identity, and social justice.

Keywords: -Caste marginalization, Dalit identity, Subaltern studies, *Untouchable*.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Indian English fiction is not just about telling stories- it is a space for wrestling with India's social, cultural, and political realities. Early on, these novels grappled with colonial encounters, then shifted to big questions about postcolonial identity. However, over time, the focus has moved closer to the ground, toward people whose voices have been pushed aside, especially when it comes to caste. The caste system in India runs deep. It is older than colonialism and still shapes everything from where people work to whether they're

treated with basic dignity. Caste does not just sort people into jobs; it decides who gets respect, who is allowed where, even who gets to feel fully human. Against this backdrop, literature steps up. It uncovers, questions, and pushes back against the caste hierarchies that everyone's learned to accept.

Even though caste sits at the heart of Indian society, early Indian English novels mostly avoided talking about what life was actually like for Dalits. Writers in the late 1800s and early 1900s usually came from upper-caste backgrounds and cared more about fighting for national independence than about fixing deep social problems at home. The pain of those labelled "untouchable" got swept under the rug or mentioned only in passing, and even then, through the lens of reformers—not from the point of view of people living that reality. That's why Mulk Raj Anand's '*Untouchable*', published in 1935, matters so much. It is one of the first Indian English novels to put a Dalit character front and centre, showing caste not as an idea, but as something lived every single day.

The novel follows Bakha, a young sweeper, through just one day in a North Indian cantonment town. Because everything happens in this tight timeframe, you feel the weight of every moment. Anand does not let caste oppression hover in the background; he drags it into the light. Bakha is shown facing public humiliation, verbal abuse, getting pushed out of spaces, and being treated as less than human. The story does not just focus on big dramatic events. Anand takes us through Bakha's daily grind- walking the bazaar, cleaning latrines, struggling to get water. In these ordinary moments, it is explained that, caste discrimination isn't just a matter of grand injustice; it is baked into routine life.

However, it is not just the subject matter that makes *Untouchable* stand out. Anand gives Bakha real depth. He is not a cardboard cut out or a symbol, he is a person, with anger, shame, confusion, and quick flashes of hope. He is painfully aware of how society sees him, but he still dreams and questions. Through Bakha, Anand pushes back against the idea that Dalits lack inner lives or agency. The novel demands that readers see Bakha as fully human, not just as a victim.

Anand being not a Dalit himself, viewed caste through the ideals of his time-Gandhian reformism and socialism. The book doesn't have neatly packaged solutions. Anand talks about moral reform, new technology, spiritual change, but he leaves things unresolved. This uncertainty has sparked debate, especially among later Dalit writers and critics who argue that true Dalit consciousness comes from self-representation, not from sympathetic portraits by outsiders.

Still, writing '*Untouchable*' just because Anand wasn't Dalit misses the point. The novel came before the Dalit literary movement got going, and you have to see it in its own time. Written in the heat of India's fight for independence, *Untouchable* challenges the comforting idea that freedom from the British would magically unite the country. Anand forces readers to face the ugly fact: political freedom means little if it doesn't come with justice for those at the bottom.

This paper argues that '*Untouchable*' navigates the rough waters of marginalization and Dalit identity in complicated ways- through its choices in storytelling, empathy, and critique. It looks at how Anand portrays Bakha's inner world, how caste shapes everyday

interactions, and how the novel wrestles with the big questions of reform, religion, and modernity. Drawing on postcolonial theory, subaltern studies, and Dalit discourse, this study places *Untouchable* squarely in the bigger story of Indian English fiction, paying close attention to the novel's inner conflicts and how it tells its story. By having a fresh, honest look at '*Untouchable*', the research shows the novel's key role in shaping how caste gets represented in literature. Sure, it doesn't map out a radical path to Dalit freedom, but it does start an important conversation and makes recognition possible. This novel, therefore, sets the stage for later Dalit writers to find their own voices and turn Indian literature from something that shuts people out into something that pushes back and demands to be heard.

2| ANALYSIS OF '*UNTOUCHABLE*' BY MULK RAJ ANAND

Everyday Caste Violence and Normalization of Marginalization

Caste violence in *Untouchable* doesn't come across as some rare, shocking event. Instead, Anand shows it as something woven into daily life. Marginalization isn't just about the obvious stuff, not just beatings or big confrontations. It is there in the way people talk, in daily routines, in the rules everyone seems to follow without thinking. Bakha's world is built on these habits. He moves through his days inside a system where humiliation feels normal, almost expected, to the point that he starts to accept it himself.

Right from the start, Bakha's job as a sweeper, shapes everything about him. He cleans latrines, work that's crucial for everyone's health, but it lands him at the very bottom of the caste ladder. Anand keeps coming back to this strange contradiction: the people who keep the town clean are somehow labelled as 'dirty'. Bakha has to warn others when he's nearby, just to keep from accidentally "polluting" them. His body itself becomes a problem, a walking target for other people's disgust. This isn't about violence in the usual sense, it is in fact, about silent rules, keeping people apart, and making sure everyone knows their place. Bakha's social positioning is announced even before he enters public space-

"He had to shout to warn the upper- caste people of his approach lest he should pollute them by his touch." (Anand 49)

There is a scene in the marketplace, where Bakha brushes up against a high-caste man. The guy explodes, yelling and shaming Bakha in front of everyone. The anger is way out of proportion to what actually happened. This is thus, clear evidence of how the system dehumanizes Dalits, treating them as if they do not even have the right to exist in public. Moreover, it is not just a few bad apples; the whole community gets in on enforcing these rules. Marginalization isn't just something done by individuals; it's baked into the culture, kept alive by everyone playing their part. That's the real weight of caste oppression in *Untouchable*: it's everywhere, and it's ordinary.

Bakha's Interior World and the Question of Dalit Subjectivity

Untouchable stands out in Indian English fiction because it really gets inside Bakha's head and heart. Anand does not just use Bakha as a symbol or a type; he builds him as a real person, someone who is always struggling to find his place in a world that seems stacked

against him. This close look at Bakha's thoughts marks a big change from older stories about Dalits, where they barely had a voice or felt like background figures. Bakha's self-awareness is evident when he reflects on his degraded position-

“Why was he condemned to live in this squalor, when others live in comfort?”
(Anand 38)

Bakha feels humiliation—deeply—but that's not all. He's angry, too. He knows things aren't fair, even if he doesn't have the words to say exactly why. The shame he carries is not something he is born with. It comes from the way people treat him, from the daily sting of being pushed aside and looked down on. Anand's use of free indirect discourse pulls us right into Bakha's mind, breaking away from the old habit of treating Dalits as if they have no emotional or intellectual depth. His anger is restrained but deeply felt. As Anand says-

“A vague resentment smouldered in his soul, but he did not know against whom to direct it.” (Anand 40)

Therefore, Bakha's inner world is not simple. He looks up to the British soldiers—he likes their uniforms, their order, their sense of equality. This is not about loving the colonizers; it is about wanting dignity for himself. Still, it shows how boxed in he is. For Bakha, modernity looks like a way out, a break from the suffocating caste system. Yet, at the core, those structures do not really go away. In Bakha, it is shown what it means to live at the edge, with hope and frustration tangled together, never quite settling into peace.

Religion, Ritual Purity, and Moral Hypocrisy

In *Untouchable*, religion does more than just prop up the caste system—it also reveals a deep split between belief and behavior. Hindu ideas about purity and pollution shape everyday life, shutting Dalits out of temples, public wells, and even the most basic shared spaces. Bakha cannot even step inside the temple. It is not just about physical barriers; he is cut off spiritually, too. Caste does not stop at the body—it digs into the soul.

Then, there is the scene with the priest Kalinath and Bakha's sister, Sohini. The priest tries to assault Sohini and, when caught, he does not face blame. Instead, he accuses her of polluting him.

“Polluted! Polluted!-Cried the priest, though it was his own hands that had been guilty.” (Anand 71)

Anand throws a harsh light on hypocritical purity here, showing the double standard. The powerful hide behind religion, covering up their own failings, while the people they hurt get blamed and silenced. The whole thing is even worse for Dalit women, who face both sexual danger and the weight of social shame.

Scenes like this let Anand tear into the moral emptiness of a religious system that cares more about ritual than kindness. He is not turning his back on spirituality itself, he is going after the version of religion that props up injustice. By calling out the gap between the lofty ideals of faith and the ugly reality, *Untouchable* questions whether caste-based exclusion can ever claim any kind of moral high ground.

Nationalism, Reform, and the Limits of Gandhian Humanism

Untouchability was rigidly interwoven inside the social political realm of the 1930s, right when the Indian nationalist movement was at its peak and everyone was arguing about how to change society. Anand dives straight into these arguments through Bakha's run-ins with nationalist leaders and his brush with Gandhian thinking. Gandhi's loud condemnation of untouchability comes across as a bold moral move, pushing for unity and a better, more ethical society. Gandhi's presence introduces reformist discourse into the novel, offering moral recognition but limited transformation. As the author quotes Gandhi-

“Untouchability is a sin against God and man.” (Anand 146)

However, Anand does not let Gandhian humanism off easy. Gandhi's speech gives Bakha a little hope and a sense of being seen, sure, but it does not actually change much for him in the real world. The focus on personal guilt and moral awakening ends up putting all the pressure on individuals to change, instead of tackling the bigger, structural problems. You can feel the tension here, the rush for political independence sometimes gets in the way of actually fixing deep-rooted social issues.

Anand also throws in the idea of technological progress, like the flush system, as a possible way to get rid of manual scavenging. That sounds forward-thinking, but it also risks treating caste oppression like it is just a technical glitch, not something built into society's beliefs. In the end, Anand doesn't tie everything up neatly. He leaves these questions hanging, showing just how tough it is to break down social hierarchies that have been around forever.

Narrative Strategy and the Ethics of Representation

Anand's way of telling the story really shapes how *Untouchable* hits you, ethically. He does not just describe things — he pulls you right into Bakha's world. You can almost smell the gutters, hear the chaos of the bazaar, and feel Bakha's exhaustion in your own bones. It is rather raw and immediate. Still, the book makes the readers think about who gets to tell these stories. Anand is not Dalit himself; he is speaking for a group that's been pushed to the margins. Some readers appreciate his empathy and his drive to expose injustice, but there is also this sense that he filters it all through his own, somewhat liberal point of view. Bakha does not really rise up or organize — he is more of a symbol for reform than for outright change.

Even with these tensions, *Untouchable* did something bold when it first came out. Anand put Dalit experiences at the center of Indian English fiction, breaking old patterns that kept those voices out. He set the stage for future Dalit writers to tell their own stories, in their own words. The narrative voice consistently aligns readers with Bakha's experiences. He rightly points to the weight of untouchability on his soul, when he writes-

“His body ached with fatigue, yet there was no rest for him.” (Anand 33)

Therefore, Anand's novel is grounded in social realism, but the beginnings of a new, subaltern perspective starting to push through can well be felt.

3| CONCLUSION

Mulk Raj Anand's novel *'Untouchable'* stands right at the heart of Indian literary history. Anand turns the novel into a space where he works through the ethics, the psychology, and all the tricky politics of what it means to be pushed to the margins.

Bakha, the main character, is not just a symbol; Anand portrays the marginalized lives that Indian English literature had pretty much kept invisible till then.

What really makes *Untouchable* stand out is how it shows caste as a kind of everyday violence. It is not just about the obvious abuse—though that is there too. It is more about all the little things: who gets to stand where, who can speak, whose body and voice counts. Bakha's humiliation is not just a one-off; it is a constant, kept alive by everyone agreeing to the rules. Anand does not let the readers pin the blame on a few "bad" people. Instead, he shows caste as a system that is in-built into the fabric of daily life. By narrowing the story to a single day in Bakha's life, Anand drives home just how relentless this oppression is. For Dalits, suffering is not something that comes and goes. It's woven into every day.

What really stands out in the novel is its description of Bakha's inner life. Anand does not just give another flat, suffering Dalit character—he lets Bakha feel things, think deeply, and wrestle with himself. There are anger and shame, sure, but also longing and confusion. The readers can almost feel how caste oppression gets under his skin, shaping the way he sees himself. It is not just society treating him as less than human; sometimes he starts to believe it too. That's a big shift from older books where writers turned marginalized people into cardboard cut outs or walking morals. Here, Bakha is real. He is complicated, and his story insists on the sufferings of people who have spent ages being ignored.

However, the novel does not stop there. It also calls out the cracks in the well-meaning, liberal talk about fixing caste. Anand gets angry about untouchability and shows real compassion, but when it comes to actual solutions, things get pretty shaky. The book floats ideas like moral reform, Gandhi's brand of humanism, or even new sanitation technology. But none of these really solve the root problem. Gandhi's speeches matter, but they do not take down the whole caste system. And saying that better toilets will fix everything? That shrinks a huge, messy injustice into something you can solve with gadgets. You can tell Anand is writing at a time when the big discussions were all about national unity and cleaning up society's morals, not really about tearing down the whole structure.

There has been a lot of debate around this—especially in Dalit studies. Later Dalit writers and critics have pushed for self-representation, saying real Dalit consciousness comes alive when people speak for themselves, not when others speak about them. From that angle, *Untouchable* feels like it talks about Dalits without truly speaking from a Dalit perspective. Bakha does not really act with collective political power, and there's no organized resistance, which pretty much highlights where Anand's reformist vision falls short.

Back in the days before independence, Indian English fiction didn't usually go there. *Untouchable*, however touched it. While nationalist writers tried to show India as united and morally pure, Anand shined a light on the fractures running deep through society. He brought caste oppression front and center, refusing to let anyone believe that political

freedom alone would fix social injustice. For Anand, fighting colonialism and fighting caste are not separate—they are, in fact, tangled up together.

Religion in the novel adds another layer. Anand digs into ideas of ritual purity and pollution, exposing the moral double standards at the heart of religious authority. The scene with the temple priest and Sohini makes it painfully clear—religion can be twisted to excuse exploitation and silence the powerless. Through moments like this, *Untouchable* calls out the ethics of religious institutions that keep people unequal. Still, Anand is not advocate to trash out spirituality altogether. Instead, he argues for a new kind of ethics—one built on compassion and justice, not just rituals.

Studying and analyzing *Untouchable* through a literary lens it shows a life caught between two worlds—grounded in social realism, but also planting the seeds for a new kind of subaltern consciousness. Anand's writing style does more than just paint a vivid picture or get inside Bakha's head; it drags us right into his daily life, where every detail stings. One cannot read this novel and keep caste oppression at arm's length. Anand made his readers feel it, pushes them to empathize, and maybe even question their own sense of justice. However, the story's voice always stands a bit outside Bakha's experience, reminding readers that representing marginalized lives comes with some tough ethical questions.

The real strength of *Untouchable* is not that it hands out simple answers. Instead, it throws light onto the mess—showing how half-hearted reforms and good intentions falling short against the weight of systemic injustice. Anand doesn't clean up the contradictions or offer neat solutions. He leaves the readers with the discomfort, forcing them to grapple with what is lacking. That is probably why this book keeps sparking debate. Even now, in an India where caste discrimination still lingers behind legal promises, Bakha's small humiliations hit home. The gap between what the law says and what people actually live is still there, and this novel keeps poking at it.

Untouchable opened doors of Indian English fiction, for inclusion of Dalit voices. Later writers, especially Dalit authors, took what Anand started and moved with it—building on his themes, but also pushing past the limits of his liberal humanism. They have made space for resistance and collective struggle, but Anand's influence is well felt, in the way they write about exclusion and voice. He broke the silence, and that mattered. By putting a Dalit protagonist at the center and laying bare the violence of caste that people barely notice, Anand asks us to see the urgency of social justice. He shows us that books can do more than just mirror reality—they can shake us out of our comfort zones and force us to face things we'd rather ignore.

Therefore, *Untouchable* stands as a landmark in Indian English fiction because it dared to tell the truth about marginalization and Dalit identity. It does not pretend to solve caste oppression, but it does something just as important; it points to the injustice, puts a question mark on human suffering, and starts a conversation that still continues. As scholars keep digging into questions of caste, identity, and representation, *Untouchable* refuses to fade away. Its power comes from the questions it raises—the ones about dignity, equality, and real change.

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ISLANDS OF CHANGE: SELF-HELP GROUP, WOMEN'S AGENCY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LIVELIHOOD SECURITY IN MAJULI, ASSAM

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Piyali Bhowmick

Assistant Professor in Sociology, Department of Social Sciences, The Assam Kaziranga University, Assam

Debasish Das

PhD Scholar, The Assam Kaziranga University, Assam

Abstract

Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have emerged as one of the most widely deployed institutional mechanisms for rural empowerment of women across India, functioning as micro-spaces for collective savings, credit access and social capability building. This qualitative study examines the lived experiences of ten women SHG members in Majuli district of Assam, the world's largest inhabited river island, to critically assess the transformative potential and structural limitations of SHG participation in one of India's most ecologically fragile and socially complex rural geographies. Drawing on in-depth interview data coded across dimensions of financial behaviour, decision-making autonomy, personal confidence, mobility, skill acquisition and community participation; the study reveals deeply differentiated empowerment outcomes shaped by the intersecting axes of community identity, educational attainment, flood vulnerability and household gender dynamics. Anchored in Naila Kabeer's framework of empowerment and the sociological concept of intersectionality, the findings demonstrate that while SHGs have meaningfully expanded economic and social agency for relatively educated and entrepreneurially active women, the most marginalised members, particularly those from Scheduled Tribe backgrounds with low literacy and chronic flood exposure, continue to face compounded barriers that the current SHG model is structurally ill-equipped to address. The paper concludes with targeted policy recommendations for building a more responsive and inclusive SHG ecosystem in Majuli's unique riverine context.

Keywords: *Self-Help Groups, Women's Empowerment, Majuli, Riverine Communities, NRLM, Microfinance, Intersectionality, Flood Vulnerability*

1 | INTRODUCTION

Majuli, the world's largest inhabited river island,¹ situated in the Brahmaputra River in upper Assam, presents one of the most challenging and instructive contexts for studying rural women's empowerment in contemporary India. Classified as a full district of Assam since 2016, Majuli is simultaneously a site of extraordinary cultural richness, being home to the Vaishnavite Sattria tradition, missing tribal weaving and neo-Vaishnavite performing arts, and of acute socioeconomic vulnerability, defined by recurring flood catastrophe, rapid land erosion, geographical isolation and limited livelihood diversification. It is within this complex terrain that the Self-Help Group movement, mobilized principally through the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM),² has sought to create pathways to women's economic participation and social transformation.

The SHG model, formalized through the SHG-Bank Linkage Programme launched by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) in 1992³, has grown into a national network of over 12 million groups. It covers approximately 142 million rural households, as documented in the Annual Report of the Ministry of Rural Development (2022-23). In Assam, NRLM data (2023) indicates that over 4.2 lakh SHGs have been formed under the Aajeevika Mission, with Majuli among the districts where SHG formation has been actively promoted as a tool of both poverty alleviation and flood resilience.⁴ The NRLM District Progress Report for Majuli (2023) records approximately 2,800 active SHGs in the district, with a total membership of around 33,600 women, drawn predominantly from the Missing, Deori and OBC communities that constitute the bulk of the rural population island.

Yet the question of whether SHG membership translates into substantive empowerment defined not merely as access to credit but as expanded agency, enhanced capability and genuine transformation of women's social position, remains deeply contested in the scholarly literature. This paper contributes to that debate by presenting field evidence from Majuli that is empirically grounded in primary interviews with ten women respondents

¹Majuli is officially recognised as the world's largest river island by the Guinness World Records. It was accorded the status of a full district of Assam in 2016, carved out of Jorhat district. Its population is approximately 1.67 lakh persons as per the 2011 Census of India, with a predominantly indigenous and agrarian character.

²The National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), known in Assam as 'Aajeevika,' is the flagship programme of the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India, for rural poverty alleviation through SHG promotion. It replaced the earlier Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) in 2011 and focuses on universal financial inclusion of rural poor households.

³The SHG-Bank Linkage Programme (SBLP), initiated by NABARD in 1992, is the world's largest microfinance programme. Under this model, SHGs open savings accounts with commercial or cooperative banks and access credit as a group guarantee, without individual collateral. As of March 2023, the programme covered over 119 lakh SHGs across India with an outstanding loan portfolio exceeding Rupees 1.51 lakh crore (NABARD Annual Report, 2022-23).

⁴Majuli is classified as an Eco-Sensitive Zone and faces severe annual flooding. The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) has recorded that between 2010 and 2022, Majuli experienced major flood events in 12 out of 13 years, each causing substantial loss of agricultural land, livestock and domestic assets. The island's land area has shrunk from approximately 1,246 sq. km in 1950 to an estimated 875 sq. km by 2021 due to riverine erosion.

across diverse social, economic and community backgrounds. The central argument of this research is that SHG membership in Majuli generates profoundly unequal empowerment outcomes, and that these inequalities are not random but structurally produced through the intersection of gender with caste and tribal identity,⁵ educational attainment, ecological vulnerability and household patriarchy. Understanding this patterned differentiation is essential if policy is to move from a one-size-fits-all approach to a genuinely inclusive architecture of rural women's empowerment.

2| THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Naila Kabeer's (1999) three-dimensional framework of empowerment, which distinguishes between resources, agency and achievements as the interlocking constituents of meaningful empowerment.⁶ Kabeer defines empowerment as the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer, 1999, p. 437). Resources constitute the pre-conditions of choice, encompassing financial, human and social assets. Agency refers to the processes through which choices are made, including deliberation, negotiation, resistance and goal setting. Achievements denote the lived outcomes of agency in terms of wellbeing, rights and social recognition. Applied to SHG participation in Majuli, this framework directs analytical attention to whether the group's financial resources expand women's choices, whether membership cultivates genuine decision-making power or merely the appearance of it, and whether observable outcomes in income, confidence and mobility constitute authentic transformation or superficial change.

The study additionally employs the concept of intersectionality, developed by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) to describe how multiple systems of oppression operate simultaneously and interactively rather than additively.⁷ In the Majuli context, intersectionality manifests in the compound disadvantages faced by ST women with primary education, illiteracy and chronic flood exposure, who are simultaneously marginalised by gender norms, tribal social structures, educational deprivation and ecological precarity. This intersectional lens prevents the analytical error of treating 'women' as a homogeneous category and insists that empowerment interventions must be sensitive to the specific configurations of disadvantage that different women inhabit. Finally, Amartya Sen's (1999) Capability

⁵The Missing (also spelled Mishing) and Deori communities are among the principal Scheduled Tribe communities of Majuli. The Missing are the largest tribal group on the island and have a distinct cultural tradition of bamboo-stilt house construction and Eri silk weaving. The Deori are a smaller but historically significant community with roots in the Ahom kingdom's ritual practices.

⁶Naila Kabeer's (1999) tripartite framework defines empowerment as constituted by Resources (the conditions that enable choice, encompassing human, social and financial assets), Agency (the process of making choices, including deliberation, negotiation and resistance) and Achievements (the outcomes of choices in terms of wellbeing and rights). This framework was specifically developed to evaluate women's empowerment in the context of microfinance interventions in South Asia.

⁷ Kimberle Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in her 1989 paper 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex,' arguing that social categories such as race, gender, and class do not operate independently but interact to produce unique and compounded forms of discrimination. In the Indian rural context, intersectionality is expressed through the overlapping axes of gender, caste or tribal identity, class and literacy.

Approach is drawn upon to evaluate outcomes not in terms of income alone but in terms of whether SHG membership expands what women are actually able to do and be in the domains of work, mobility, civic participation and self-expression.

3| RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in interpretive epistemology, which treats social reality as constructed through meaning-making processes and therefore best studied through methods that access those meanings directly. Semi-structured interviews⁸ were selected as the primary data collection tool because they allow systematic coverage of key thematic domains while preserving the flexibility to explore emergent, unanticipated insights from respondents. Qualitative methods are particularly appropriate for the research questions at hand, which concern subjective experience, intra-household dynamics and the social mediation of empowerment, none of which can be adequately captured through survey questionnaires or quantitative indices.

Fieldwork was conducted in Majuli district across seven villages between July 2025 to Nov 2025. Study sites were selected purposively to ensure variation in community composition (tribal and non-tribal), degree of flood exposure, SHG age and type (NRLM-affiliated and independently formed) and geographic location across the island's northern and southern reaches. Initial contact was made through the Majuli District Rural Development Agency and subsequently through snowball referrals to reach members less visible through official channels.

Ten women SHG members were interviewed,⁹ each session lasting between 50 and 100 minutes. The interview guide covered the following thematic domains: motivations for joining and joining mode; savings behaviour and loan utilisation; income change and livelihood diversification; household decision-making and control over income; confidence, public speaking and mobility; training received and its perceived usefulness; challenges faced and suggestions for improvement; and overall perception of empowerment. All interviews were conducted in Assamese and Missing language, audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework¹⁰ was applied to identify patterns, divergences and structural regularities across the dataset.

⁸Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to follow a predetermined thematic guide while retaining the flexibility to pursue emergent themes raised by the respondent. This format is widely regarded as particularly appropriate for qualitative studies of sensitive social phenomena such as household power dynamics and women's agency (Kvale, 2007; Creswell, 2014).

⁹Respondent codes (R1 through R10) are used throughout this paper in place of names to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, consistent with the ethical protocols approved for this study. All respondents provided written informed consent for participation and audio-recording of interviews.

¹⁰Thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) proceeds through six phases: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. It is a flexible yet rigorous method widely used in qualitative social science research.

4| RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

The ten respondents represent a deliberately heterogeneous sample (see Table 1) reflecting the social diversity of SHG membership in Majuli. Four respondents (R2, R4, R5 and R7) identify as Scheduled Tribe (ST), comprising Missing and Deori community members; four (R1, R6, R8 and R9) identify as Other Backward Class (OBC); and two (R3 and R10) as General category. This distribution broadly mirrors the community composition of rural Majuli. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS 2021-22) ¹¹ recorded female workforce participation in rural Assam at just 17.3 per cent, underscoring the structural context of labour market exclusion within which SHG membership becomes significant. All respondents except R7, who is widowed, are married, and their ages span three cohorts: 25 to 35 (R4 and R6), 36 to 45 (R1, R5, R9 and R10) and 46 to 55 (R3, R7 and R8).

Educational attainment varies considerably across the sample, from R3 who holds a graduate degree to R5 and R10 who are illiterate, and this gradient proves to be among the strongest predictors of empowerment depth throughout the analysis. Years of SHG membership range from nine years (R3, who joined in 2016) to two years (R10, who joined in 2022). Positions held within SHGs also differ: R3 is a President, R6 a Treasurer and R9 a secretary, while the remaining seven hold general membership positions. The table below summarizes the key characteristics of all respondents.

Table 1: Socioeconomic Profile of Respondents, Majuli District (n=10)

Code	Age	Community	Education	Occupation	Income (Rupees)	Position	Year Joined	Joined Via
R1	36-45	OBC	HSLC	Weaving	10k-20k	Member	2018	Voluntary
R2	31-45	ST	Middle	Agriculture	5k-10k	Member	2019	NRLM
R3	46-55	General	Graduate	Self-employed	Above 20k	President	2016	Voluntary
R4	25-35	ST	Primary	Housewife	Below 5k	Member	2021	Encouraged
R5	36-45	ST	Illiterate	Wage	5k-	Member	2020	NRLM

¹¹The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) is an annual household survey conducted by the National Statistical Office (NSO) of India. The PLFS 2021-22 is the most recently published round covering rural Assam's female labour force participation in detail. The figure of 17.3 per cent for rural Assam remains significantly below the national rural female LFPR of 27.7 per cent.

				labour	10k			
R6	25-35	OBC	HS	Tailoring	10k-20k	Treasurer	2020	Voluntary
R7	46-55	ST	Primary	Agriculture	5k-10k	Member	2017	Encouraged
R8	31-45	OBC	HSLC	Tailoring	5k-10k	Member	2019	Voluntary
R9	36-45	OBC	HS	Handicraft	10k-20k	Secretary	2018	Voluntary
R10	36-45	General	Illiterate	Wage labour	Below 5k	Member	2022	NRLM

Financial Behaviour and the Limits of Credit-Led Empowerment

All the ten respondents had accessed bank credit through their SHGs, confirming the near-universal reach of the SHG-Bank Linkage Programme in the study area. However, a sharp divergence in loan amounts, purposes and empowerment outcomes is visible across the sample. Among the OBC respondents (R1, R6, R8 and R9) and the graduate General category respondent (R3), loans ranging from Rupees 50,000 to Rupees 2 lakh were deployed for income-generating purposes including small enterprise establishment, collective handicraft marketing and tailoring unit expansion. All five reported increased income since joining and maintained savings contributions of Rupees 200 to Rupees 300 per month. By contrast, the four ST respondents (R2, R4, R5 and R7) and R10 accessed loans below Rupees 50,000, used primarily for livestock purchase, household consumption needs and health emergencies. Income improvement among this group was described uniformly as only ‘slight,’ and none reported full financial independence. The NRLM Progress Report for Assam (2022-23) noted that average loan sizes in flood-prone districts of upper Assam remained significantly below the state average, attributed to conservative bank risk assessment in high-erosion zones such as Majuli (see Table 1).

The 2022 Brahmaputra floods ¹² severely disrupted loan repayment cycles for R5 and R7, both of whom described months of debt paralysis following inundation of their livestock and agricultural assets. This pattern speaks to a fundamental design flaw in the current credit model: loan disbursement is not calibrated to the ecological calendar of flood-vulnerable communities, and no automatic moratorium or disaster credit mechanism exists within the standard SBLP framework. The NABARD Annual Report (2022-23) acknowledges that Non-Performing Asset rates in Assam’s flood-prone districts average 8.2 per cent against a national SHG NPA average of 5.4 per cent, yet policy correction has been incremental at best. Swain and Wallentin (2009), whose large-scale study of Indian

¹²The Brahmaputra floods in 2022 caused cumulative damage estimated at Rupees. 3,426 crore across Assam, according to the ASDMA Consolidated Flood Report 2022. Majuli was among the first sub-divisions to be inundated in the early June flood wave, with over 65,000 persons affected in the first fortnight of the season alone.

SHGs found that financial empowerment outcomes are strongly mediated by initial asset endowments and social network quality, offers a useful explanatory frame: without prior asset security, credit alone produces debt dependency rather than livelihood expansion (see Table 1).

Decision-Making Autonomy and Household Power Dynamics

The dataset reveals a clear and consistent gradient in household decision-making authority that tracks almost perfectly with the education and income gradient. Respondents R1, R3, R6 and R9 all report that they ‘always’ participate in household expenditure decisions and exercise full control over their income. R2 and R8 report partial and intermittent involvement. The areas of R4, R5, R7 and R10 signify that there is little or no participation in household financial decisions and no control or negligible influence over their income. This gradient maps precisely onto the axis of education and community: all four ST respondents and both illiterate respondents fall within the most disempowered cluster on decision-making (see Table 1).

R4, who joined in 2021 after encouragement from a neighbour and holds a primary education level, described her domestic situation during the interview with visible resignation: *My husband handles all money matters. He knows I save in the group, but he does not ask me about it. When I want to attend meetings, sometimes he says no.* Her account instantiates what Kabeer (1999) distinguishes as the difference between formal membership in an empowering institution and substantive agency, the actual capacity to deliberate and act. The Assam State Commission for Women’s Biennial Report (2021-22) corroborates this micro-level pattern at the aggregate level, noting that SHG coverage expansion in rural Assam has not been accompanied by commensurate declines in self-reported domestic constraints on women's mobility and financial autonomy. Datta (2015), in her study of SHGs in Kamrup district, similarly found that household decision-making empowerment required prior changes in gender norm negotiation within the family, which formal group membership alone could not generate.

Confidence, Mobility and Community Voice

Eight of ten respondents reported improved personal confidence since joining their SHGs, making this one of the most consistent positive findings in the dataset. Even R4 and R5, who report constrained economic empowerment and limited household authority, acknowledged feeling 'somewhat' more capable of speaking in group settings than they were before joining. R7, a widowed ST woman who joined in 2017 following encouragement from community members, described attending a village panchayat meeting for the first time after two years of SHG participation as an event that surprised even herself: *I never thought I would speak in front of men there. But I stood and said what our group needed. No one stopped me.* This testimony illustrates the gradual, non-linear and often surprising ways in which collective institutional experience can begin to erode internalized constraints on women's public presence (see Table 1).

Community participation levels follow a similarly stratified pattern. R1, R3, R6 and R9 report high community participation; R2 and R8 report moderate engagement, while R4, R5, R7 and R10 remain at low levels (see Table 1). Mobility improvements mirror this

distribution: all high-participation respondents report improved freedom of movement outside the home, while low-participation respondents report no discernible change. The NRLM's 2022 National Impact Assessment Study, covering 18,000 SHG members across six states including Assam, found that 63 per cent of members with five or more years of membership reported increased mobility compared to only 29 per cent of those with less than two years of participation, a temporal gradient consistent with the findings.

Skill Training: Enabler or Missed Opportunity?

Seven of ten respondents reported receiving training through or in connection with their SHG membership. Training types ranged from skill-only programmes (R2, R5, R7) to combined skill and financial literacy courses (R1, R8) and comprehensive skills, financial literacy and leadership training (R3, R6, R9). R4 and R10 received no training, while R5 received skill training as only '*moderately useful*' because the skills taught were not aligned with the flood-seasonality constraints of her livelihood context (see Table 1). The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY),¹³ the principal skill training scheme linked to NRLM, has been documented by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG Report No. 8, 2022) as suffering from persistent training-livelihood mismatch, particularly in remote geographies such as Majuli where trained skills often have limited local market applicability.

The combination of skill, financial literacy and leadership training appears particularly transformative. R6 and R3, who received all three types, demonstrate the strongest empowerment profiles across every dimension measured in this study: full financial independence, maximum community participation, high confidence, full household decision-making authority and active entrepreneurial practice. R6 described her experience of leadership training as cognitively transformative: '*Before the training, I thought managing money was for men. After, I understood I could manage better than anyone in my house. I started keeping accounts. I taught others.*' This account resonates with Freire's (1970) concept of conscientisation, in which structured educational experience does not merely transmit skills but transforms how people perceive their own capacity for agency and change (see Table 1).

The Ecology of Constraint: Floods, Markets and Family Resistance

The most frequently cited structural challenges across the ten interviews are flood vulnerability (mentioned by R2, R5, R6, R7 and R9), inadequate market access (mentioned by R1, R8 and R9) and family resistance to women's economic participation (mentioned by R4 and R10). These challenges are not independent but interact in compounding ways, particularly for the ST respondents who simultaneously face all three. R5, whose Eri silk rearing operation was destroyed in the 2022 floods, described an experience of multi-

¹³The Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) is a placement-linked skill development programme under the Ministry of Rural Development. In Assam, it is implemented through state-empanelled training partners. A persistent challenge noted by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG Report No. 8, 2022) is the mismatch between skills trained and skills demanded in local labour markets, particularly in remote islands and flood-prone geographies.

layered dispossession: the flood took her raw material, her loan repayment fell into arrears, her group penalized her meeting absences, and she had no recourse through any institutional channel. The government gives us the group, she said, *but the group cannot stop the river.* Her statement carries both the literal truth of ecological vulnerability and the figurative critique of an institutional model that is designed for stable environments and breaks down precisely when it is most needed (see Table 1).

Market access constraints affect even the most entrepreneurially active women in the sample. R9, the Secretary of her SHG and operator of a collective handicraft marketing enterprise, described the asymmetric power relationship with itinerant traders who visit Majuli infrequently and offer prices well below retail value: *'We have no choice. If we do not sell them, our products sit in the house until next season. There is no way to send goods to the city ourselves.'* The India Brand Equity Foundation's Handloom Sector Report (2023) estimates the domestic handloom market at over Rs. 31,000 crores, growing at approximately 8.5 per cent annually, yet Majuli's artisan SHG members are structurally excluded from this market by the combination of geographic isolation, digital literacy gaps and the absence of reliable logistics infrastructure on the island.

Critical Analysis and Policy Implications

The findings of this study resist both uncritical optimism and blanket pessimism about SHG-led women's empowerment in Majuli. The evidence clearly demonstrates that SHGs are genuinely transformative for a segment of their membership: women who combine educational capital with entrepreneurial motivation, access to multi-dimensional training and a household environment that is at minimum tolerant of their economic activity. For these women, exemplified by R3, R6 and R9, SHG membership has restructured their relationship to income; public life and their own sense of capability in ways that are durable and accumulating (see Table 1). This finding is consistent with Kabeer's (2001) argument that when SHG participation occurs within an enabling constellation of resources, agency and social support, it can produce genuinely transformative outcomes.

However, for the majority of respondents in this sample, particularly the four ST women (R2, R4, R5 and R7) and the two illiterate respondents (R5 and R10), the transformative potential of SHG membership remains largely unrealized (see Table 1). The barriers they face are not incidental or individually resolvable but structurally produced: ecological vulnerability to floods that destroy livelihood assets and disrupts repayment schedules; the absence of disaster-responsive credit mechanisms; patriarchal household norms that deny them decision-making authority; and the persistent devaluation of their labour in asymmetric market arrangements. Sinha and Upadhyay (2021), in their review of SHG research in northeast India, characterize this as the 'credit-first paradox': the more marginalised a woman is, the more she needs the full enabling ecosystem around the SHG, but the less likely she is to access it through the existing model.

On the basis of this evidence, four targeted interventions are proposed. First, a Flood Resilience Credit Mechanism should be integrated into the SHG-bank linkage framework for Majuli and other flood-prone districts, providing automatic loan moratoriums and emergency credit access within 72 hours of a declared flood event, modelled on the

disaster credit protocols of Kerala's Kudumbashree network.¹⁴ Second, a Majuli Island Artisan Digital Market Platform should be established by the District Industries Centre in partnership with the Assam Handloom Corporation, enabling SHG members to access e-commerce channels without requiring individual digital literacy, using a managed facilitation model. Third, all NRLM-linked skill training in the district should be subjected to an annual ecological and market relevance audit, with curricula redesigned to align with the flood calendar and the specific livelihood constraints of island geography. Fourth, family engagement programmes, specifically awareness workshops co-facilitated with male household members and local religious and community leaders, should be introduced as a standard component of SHG mobilization in Majuli, to address the household patriarchy that prevents financial empowerment from translating into decision-making authority.

5| CONCLUSION

Majuli's SHG landscape is a microcosm of the larger paradox at the heart of India's rural women's empowerment agenda: a universal institutional solution applied to a profoundly non-universal social reality.¹⁵ The ten women whose experiences animate this study collectively illuminate a landscape of differentiated possibility, in which the same institutional membership generates radically different outcomes depending on the social, educational and ecological position of the member. For some, the SHG is indeed an island of change, a space in which new economic identities, public voices and household authority are gradually being forged. For others, it is an island within an island: formally present but substantively enclosed by flood waters, market exclusion, domestic constraint and the slow erosion of both land and aspiration.

The theoretical contribution lies in its demonstration that empowerment is not a property of institutions but of the relationship between institutions and the social structures in which they are embedded. SHGs cannot empower women in isolation from the broader conditions that determine whether resources translate into agency and whether agency translates into achievement. This has direct implications for how SHG programmes are designed, monitored and evaluated: effectiveness must be measured not by group formation targets or credit disbursement volumes but by the depth and durability of empowerment across the most marginalised members, not only the most capable ones.

The metaphor of Majuli is apt. Just as the island itself is perpetually at risk of being diminished by the forces that surround it, yet continues to sustain life, culture and

¹⁴Kerala's Kudumbashree network, established in 1998 under the state's poverty eradication mission, is widely regarded as India's most successful women's SHG federation. It covers 45 lakh members across Kerala and has integrated a disaster credit facility that provides interest-free emergency loans within 72 hours of a declared natural disaster, which was deployed effectively during the 2018 Kerala floods.

¹⁵Endnote on study limitations: This study is based on a purposive sample of ten respondents selected from SHGs in Majuli district and does not claim statistical representativeness. The findings should be read as indicative of qualitative patterns and contextual dynamics rather than as generalisable quantitative estimates. Future research with larger and probability-based samples would strengthen the empirical foundation of the arguments presented here.

resistance with remarkable tenacity, so too do these ten women embody a form of agency that persists against structural odds. The task for policy is not to celebrate that persistence as a moral virtue but to recognise it as a testimony to the gap between what is and what must be, and to build institutional bridges across that gap with the urgency and specificity that Majuli's women deserve.

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