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### Message

Heartiest congratulations and best wishes on the successful release of **Volume 1, Issue 5** of *Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupt Publication*. May this publication continue to serve as a vibrant platform for intellectual exchange, literary excellence, and innovative research. Wishing the entire editorial team and contributors continued success in inspiring readers, promoting knowledge, and upholding high academic standards. May each new issue reach greater heights and make a meaningful contribution to the world of education and literature.

Once again, congratulations on this remarkable achievement. Your accomplishment is a testament to your unwavering commitment to academic excellence and your profound contribution to the advancement of knowledge in English literature and language research.

**Prof. Puneet Bisaria**  
Dean (Arts) & Head,  
Department of Hindi  
Bundelkhand University, Jhansi



**RMSG**  
Message

(RASHTRAKAVI MAITHILI SHARAN GUPT)

It gives me immense pleasure to extend my best wishes to the organizers of the *Journal*. This theme is both timely and significant, as it highlights the evolving role of Indian women across generations—from the struggles of the past to the empowerment of the present digital world. I appreciate the efforts of all scholars and participants contributing their insights to this important academic dialogue. May this conference inspire meaningful discussions and open new dimensions of thought on gender, progress, and equality.

Warm Regards

**Prof. Puneet Bisaria**

**Dr. Pritee Jain (Founder Chief Editor)**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Head, Dept. of English**  
**Rashtrakavi Maithilisharan Gupta**  
**Mahavidyalaya, Chirgaon, Jhansi**



Message

As Editor of *Rashtrakavi Maithili Sharan Gupta Publication*, I extend my sincere best wishes on the release of Volume 1, Issue 5. This issue reflects the collective efforts of our dedicated contributors and editorial team, and I hope it continues to promote meaningful research, thoughtful writing, and academic excellence. May our publication grow stronger with each issue and continue to inspire readers and scholars alike.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to all participants, researchers, and academicians for their valuable contributions. May this conference serve as a platform for meaningful dialogue, innovation, and inspiration toward a more inclusive and progressive society.

**Warm Regards**

**Dr. Pritee Jain**  
Founder & Chief Editor  
RMSG Publication

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## **Impact of Partition on Sonipat (1947–1965)**

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### **Abstract**

*In August 1947, India gained independence and was partitioned into two independent dominions--India having a Hindu majority and Pakistan having a Muslim majority. The partition brought about a remarkable change in the society and demography of North India, significantly affecting the areas around Delhi, including Sonipat. Using primary sources (such as District and State Gazetteers, revenue records), secondary sources, interviews with the members of partition-affected families and personal observation, the present research examines how the large-scale migration of people restructured the society of Sonipat and brought about demographic shifts. It also studies the settlement of refugees and social transformation. There was a significant demographic reconstitution as a result of influx of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan and the emigration of Muslims from India. This paper explores the settlement pattern of refugees, the redistribution of property and agricultural land, and the emergence of new residential areas and markets in Sonipat. It further investigates the way in which entrepreneurial initiatives by refugees played a key role in the expansion of trade and industry, slowly reshaping Sonipat from a predominantly agrarian settlement into a semi-urban centre. Apart from examining material reconstruction, the study analyzes changes in caste structures, inter-community relationships and local political engagement. It further highlights the memory, traumatic experience and social integration which influenced the formation of collective identity in the post-colonial times. By positioning Sonipat within the wider historiography of Partition and post-colonial transformation, this research claims that Partition was not simply an episode of displacement but a critical moment that*

*reconfigured the social geography and institutional framework of the district. This study enriches the regional history by highlighting how national cataclysms were experienced and handled at the local level, showing that the post-colonial society in Sonipat was deeply shaped by the enduring legacies of Partition.*

**Keywords: Sonipat, partition, refugees, rehabilitation, demographic change, Pakistan**

## **1. Introduction**

The partition of the Indian subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan in August 1947 resulted in unprecedented communal violence and mass migration of people now comprising Pakistan, especially West Pakistan, to the Punjab and vice versa. This extraordinary event uprooted entire communities, left more than a million dead, fifteen million refugees and tens of thousands of women abducted. It involved inevitable hardships, miseries and tragedies. Haryana at that time was a part of Punjab. There were communal riots in the districts of Karnal, Gurgaon and Rohtak.<sup>i</sup> At that time Sonipat was a tehsil of Rohtak district and it also witnessed a noteworthy demographic shift as a result of the immigration of refugees from Pakistan and outmigration of Muslims to Pakistan. This research paper investigates the impact of partition on Sonipat by concentrating on three key aspects—shifts in population patterns, settlement and rehabilitation of refugees, socio-economic, cultural and political restructuring that occurred between 1947 and 1965.

## **2. Historical Background: Sonipat before Partition**

Sonipat is an ancient town with great antiquity, and it is believed to have been established by the early Aryan settlers. The historicity of Sonipat dates back to the Mahabharata period as General Cunningham identifies it as *Swarnaprashta*--one of the five pats (villages) demanded by Yudhisthira from Duryodhan as the price of peace.<sup>ii</sup> Evidence from Pre-Harappan, Harappan, Late Harappan, Painted Grey Ware, Northern Black Polished Ware, and Early Medieval Pottery shows continuous habitation in this area. Archaeological sites such as Rindhana, Chappra, Garhwal, Ahulana, and Butana reveal cultural phases from 2300 BCE onward. Though Sonipat is not mentioned in the Vedic texts, its first reference is found as Sonaprashta in

grammarians Panini's work *Ashtadhyayi* and Buddhist texts also mention nearby settlements. The region witnessed the rule of Indo-Greeks, Kushanas, Guptas, Hunas, and Pushpbhutis, with a seal of Haryshvardhana discovered here.

During medieval times, Sonipat was ruled by the Tomars, Chauhans, Delhi Sultanate Mughals. It experienced invasions by Sultan Masud and later Ahmad Shah Abdali. Sikh leader Banda Singh Bahadur also fought an early battle here in 1709. Sonipat came under Maratha rule in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. After the 1803 Treaty of Surji Arjungaon, Sonipat came under the British rule. The people of Sonipat actively participated in the Revolt of 1857 and later national movements such as Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India.

### **3. Large-Scale Migration and Demographic Shifts Triggered by Partition (1947-51)**

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The declaration of Indian Independence Act in June 1947 by the British led to widespread communal tensions and large-scale violence in many parts of North-Western India. Prior to the formation of Haryana in 1966, Sonipat belonged to Punjab. It emerged as one of the major centre of displacement. A large number of refugees from the West Punjab flooded in the camps located at Kurukshetra, Ambala, Karnal, Panipat, Sonipat, Hisar, Hansi, Bhiwani, Rohtak and Gurgaon.<sup>iii</sup> These displaced people were called refugees because they did not depart from their homes of their own free will, and there was no systematic or organized exchange of population by the two governments.<sup>iv</sup> During August and September 1947, nearly 50 lakh Hindus, including Sikhs, migrated from West Pakistan to India. Within a week of August 15, 1947, approximately 11 lakh refugees had reached East Punjab, and in the weeks that followed, another 25 lakh arrived. The evacuation was carried out through various means, including horses, bullock carts, road transport, and on foot. Between August and November 1947, around 673 trains transported 27, 94, 368 refugees. In addition, nearly 12 lakh people arrived by road, while about 8, 49, 000 reached Punjab on foot in search of safety and shelter. Despite finding refuge, they were unable to forget the suffering and trauma they endured during their displacement.<sup>v</sup>

The large-scale evacuation of minorities from West Punjab to East Punjab was described by Sardar Patel as the “greatest rescue operation” in history. What initially seemed almost impossible was ultimately accomplished through continuous planning at every level of government, from top authorities to local administrators. This massive organizational undertaking, carried out with determination and resilience despite a number of challenges and intense public emotions, ensured the successful completion of an extraordinary humanitarian effort.<sup>vi</sup> Although the transfer of population marked the greatest mass migration in history, it was followed by what became the most extensive land resettlement operation ever undertaken in the world.<sup>vii</sup> The resettlement of refugees proved to be a major challenge for the government as the pattern of influx varied from one region to another.<sup>viii</sup> There was an acute shortage of land. While the Hindus and Sikhs had vacated nearly 2.7 million hectares of land in West Punjab, only about 1.9 million hectares were left behind by Muslims in East Punjab. Each displaced family was required to submit an application supported by the proof of the land it had lost for registering claim. Over half a million claims were submitted within a month. These claims were subsequently examined in open assemblies which consisted of fellow migrants from the same village. As a government official read each claim aloud, the assembly would either confirm, modify, or reject it. On the basis of this process, land was allotted to the claimants, and financial assistance was provided to help them resume agricultural activities.<sup>ix</sup>

To resettle the refugees, camps were also established in Sonapat district. Free rations were distributed in these camps. On medical advice, fruits, multivitamin tablets, and other special dietary items were provided to the refugees, and dispensaries were opened to offer immediate medical assistance. These camps greatly supported the displaced people, who, after staying there for some time, began searching for work to rehabilitate themselves. A majority of the rural refugees moved to villages, where they were offered temporary possession of lands left by Muslims who had migrated to Pakistan. Those in urban areas adopted various occupations in towns. A large number of immigrants who settled in different parts of Sonapat district had come from Jhang, Multan, Muzaffargarh and Layallpur and other parts of Pakistan.<sup>x</sup>

Sr.No.	District of Origin (In Pakistan)	Number of Displaced persons settled in the district		
		Rural Area	Urban Area	Total
1.	Jhang	11200	11015	22215
2.	Multan	1434	4483	5917
3.	Muzafargarh	11546	10433	21979
4.	Lyallpur	485	1501	1986
5.	Other parts of Pakistan	2839	5649	8488
	<b>Total</b>	27504	33081	60585

Source: Haryana District Gazetteers: Sonipat, 1990

#### 4. Mortality, Trauma and Memory

As massive caravans of refugees set out on perilous and uncertain journeys across the freshly drawn borders, opposing communities were involved in brutal acts of retaliation against one another. In response to the escalating crisis, a joint Military Evacuation Organization was established. Under this arrangement, the Pakistani army assumed responsibility for safeguarding Muslim refugees, while the Indian army protected Hindu and Sikh refugees. Together, they supervised what effectively became a large-scale population transfer in Punjab. Despite these measures, violence persisted unabated. Trains were frequently intercepted, and passengers were slaughtered without discrimination or mercy. In many tragic instances, trains reached their destinations filled only with dead bodies. Women suffered especially grievously during this period, as their bodies were viewed as symbols of communal honor. They were abducted, assaulted, and killed by men from rival communities seeking to dishonor the other group. In some heartbreaking cases, men chose to kill their own female relatives rather than risk their capture and violation by members of the opposing community. The traumatic memories of such brutality and displacement lingered in the minds of refugees for years,

profoundly influencing their perspectives and shaping their sense of identity and belonging within their new nation-states. At the same time, the Indian government faced immense challenges in rehabilitating these displaced populations and in determining the legal and social foundations of their citizenship.<sup>xi</sup>

## **5. Settlement and Land Redistribution**

The Government of India established the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation on September 6, 1947, to provide relief and rehabilitation to displaced people. A uniform policy was adopted across the country for relief work. The government provided financial and other benefits to the refugees for their rehabilitation, including technical and vocational training, priority in government service recruitment, and loans for small businesses.<sup>xii</sup>

### **(i) Rural Rehabilitation**

The sudden influx of refugees from rural areas led to enormous challenges. Large number of peasants and their families who had left their homes and agricultural lands sought refuge and resettlement in Punjab and nearby areas. Rural rehabilitation involved not only giving temporary relief and shelter but also restoring livelihoods, allocating land, and integrating refugees into agrarian economies.

#### **(a) Allocation of Land**

Initially, land was allocated on a temporary basis to groups of cultivators who preferred to settle together as a community. Later, the government called for formal claims from refugees through prescribed application forms. After the verification of claims with the help of revenue records obtained from the Government of Pakistan, land was re-allotted to them on quasi permanent basis.<sup>xiii</sup>

#### **(b) Disbursement of Agricultural Loans**

The people who were allocated land were provided financial assistance in the form of agricultural loans to help them purchase bullocks, farming implements, fodder and seeds, as well as to repair wells and houses. In order to prevent the misuse of funds, these loans were disbursed in

kind rather than in cash. In total, an amount of Rs. 547, 047 was advanced in the district as agricultural loans.

### **(ii) Urban Rehabilitation**

The partition on India led to immense disruption in towns and cities throughout North India, including Sonipat. With the arrival of large number of displaced persons from West Pakistan, Sonipat witnessed a rapid increase in population that strained its urban resources and facilities. Therefore, urban rehabilitation became an urgent priority, beginning with the provision for immediate relief such as food, shelter, medical care, and later providing evacuee houses, shops and plots left behind by those who migrated to Pakistan.

#### **(a) Rehabilitation Colonies**

To provide covered shelter to the refugees, a mud-hut colony (*kacche* quarter) was established in Sonipat in March 1951. A total of 730 huts were constructed, with the cost of each hut fixed at Rs. 255—Rs. 75 for the land and Rs. 180 for the construction of the superstructure. Initially, these huts were allotted to the camp residents on rental basis. In May 1953, the huts were offered to the occupants for purchase at a reserved price. Among the residents, some had already had their claims verified against the property they had left behind in Pakistan, while others were non-claimants. For those whose claims had been verified, the cost of the mud hut was adjusted through the settlement authorities with whom they had applied for compensation. From the non-claimants only the cost of land was recovered while the rest of the cost of mud hut was recoverable in three annual installments. In case of destitute widows, however, these huts were allotted free of charge.<sup>xiv</sup> According to another information, the place where *Kacche Quarter* (temporary mud-houses) is located today was allotted to the refugees in 1957 and by 1965, people had built their 36-yard houses by making mud walls. Since then this area is called *Kacche Quarter*. By 1970, shops started coming up in these temporary houses. Initially, a grocery shop came up here and after that, all kinds of shops started coming up. In 1972, utensils and clothes business started.

**(b) Urban Loans**

In urban areas, loans were disbursed to the displaced people to help them reestablish themselves in different locations. Individuals from various professional backgrounds—including traders, artisans, lawyers, industrialists, and medical practitioners—were supported through these loans. The interest on loans was 3 percent per annum, and repayment was scheduled to begin three years after the date of disbursement. The total amount, along with accrued interest was to be repaid in equal installments over a period of six years. Strict conditions were imposed to ensure that the loans were used solely for the purposes for which they had been sanctioned. However, after 1957, the scheme of urban loans was discontinued. The figures in the table given below indicate the year-wise amounts of loans advanced to displaced people between 1949-50 and 1956-57.<sup>xv</sup>

Year	Loans Disbursed in Rs.
1949-50	3,66,615
1950-51	1,96,087
1951-52	1,03,023
1952-53	8,483
1953-54	1,917
1954-55	5,805
1955-56	10,800
1956-57	9,000

Source: Haryana District Gazetteers: Sonipat, 1990

**(c) Shopping Centre**

A shopping centre called Punjabi market was also established in Ganaur. A total of 82 shops were built by displaced people, who were provided financial assistance in the form of loans of Rs. 500 each by the Rehabilitation Department.<sup>xvi</sup> The market still exists today.

**(d) Other Residential Development Schemes**

The number and quality of the houses vacated in the West Punjab were very much superior to those vacated in the East Punjab.<sup>xvii</sup> The shortage of houses remained severe because most of the Muslims who migrated from Sonipat were laborers and artisans and therefore owned modest houses. In contrast, many of the incoming refugees were traders and shopkeepers who were used to comparatively better living conditions. Considering this situation, the government initiated a number of housing schemes, including the development of new townships (Model Towns) for rich and upper-middle class persons. For lower middle-class and poor sections who were unable to afford houses or plots in planned townships and were also unwilling to live in mud huts, the government introduced a scheme of develop low-cost housing colonies.<sup>xviii</sup> So they offered an 8-marla low-cost housing colony and 4-marla low-cost tenements for lower-middle and poor sections.<sup>xix</sup> The details of the houses constructed and plots developed under these schemes are presented below:

Sr.No	Types of Residences	Number of Houses	Number of Shops	Number of Plots
1.	New Townships	200	10	288

	(Model Town)			
2.	8-Marla Housing Colonies	200	00	17
3.	4-Marla Housing Colonies	108	00	00

Source: Haryana District Gazetteers: Sonipat, 1990

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The approved layout plan of Model Town, Sonipat is given below:



Photo of Original Layout map of Model Town, Sonipat

Source: Revenue Department, Sonipat

Houses and building sites were also sold at reserved prices under the East Punjab Refugees Rehabilitation (Building and Building Sites) Act, 1948. Initially, only 46 houses and 50 plots were sold under this scheme. Later, on June 11, 1963, the government decided that the houses and plots in rehabilitation colonies should be disposed of according to the provisions laid down in Rules 28 and 90 of the Displaced Persons (Compensation and Rehabilitation) Rules, 1955. In cases where these properties were sold to displaced persons, 20 percent of the sale price had to be paid in cash, while the remaining amount was to be recovered in seven equal installments along with interest at the rate of 4.5 percent per annum. However, when such properties were sold to non-displaced persons, the recovery of the sale price was carried out in accordance with the provisions of Rule 90.<sup>xx</sup> Apart from governments efforts voluntary organizations like Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) also did commendable work for the rehabilitation of the displaced people.<sup>xxi</sup>

#### **(e) Industrial Townships**

To generate additional employment at major refugee centres, the Punjab government initiated a scheme to develop industrial townships near important urban areas with existing or potential industrial growth. A government committee recommended the establishment of such townships at Faridabad, Bahadurgarh, Sonapat, Panipat, Jagadhar, Khanna, Rupnagar, Ludhiana and Jalandhar, as well as at a location between New Delhi and Ambala.<sup>xxii</sup>

### **6. Impact and Legacy of Partition**

The habits, customs, dress, language, food habits, and lifestyle of the refugees had a noticeable impact on the local population. The refugees made a considerable progress in the economic sphere. The immigrant peasantry was more progressive and experienced because they had earlier farmed in well-irrigated canal colonies and were familiar with modern agricultural techniques and farming methods. After receiving evacuee land, they applied these techniques, which made their cropping patterns more productive and profitable. Their success encouraged the local peasants to adopt similar modern practices, increasing

agricultural production and trade. They also developed previously uncultivated land and introduced mechanized farming.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The immigrants soon captured the market, which had earlier been dominated by the local *banias*, and achieved this by following the policy of “low profit and quick sale”. They also established small-scale industries and began producing goods that were in high demand. Many of these items were seen by the local people for the first time. The local population became attracted to these new products and gradually started using them. This exposure brought changes in their outlook, and they began to consider themselves more modern. As a result, trade and business in the town also experienced significant growth.<sup>xxiv</sup> Punjabi refugees obtained loans and various forms of government assistance to establish industries in town near Delhi. Many of these industries later gained recognition for producing a wide range of high-quality manufactured goods.<sup>xxv</sup> To cite an example, **Rai Bahadur Janki Das Kapur (1893-1967)**, who came to Sonipat from Lahore, started manufacturing bicycle seats in 1951-52 from a small shed. Later, he established the Atlas Cycle factory located in the middle of the city. By 1965, Atlas Cycles became the largest bicycle manufacturer in India.<sup>xxvi</sup> Today a number of education and healthcare institutions largely concentrated in Sonipat are run by Dewan Harnam Das Saraswati Devi Trust, established in 1957 by Janki Das Kapur to honor his parents. Another example is **Ramkishan Narang** who came to Sonipat in 1947. In a personal interview with the author of this paper, Late Ramkishan’s son Prem Narang told that his father came to Sonipat from a village named Shershah in Multan district. He started selling pakodas at Sonipat railway station and then moved to a *Khokha* (kiosk) near kacche quarter market.<sup>xxvii</sup> Today this 75 year old R.K sweet shop which is being managed by Ram Kishan’s sons and grandsons, is considered one of the most famous and long-standing food spots in Sonipat.

Although government schemes played an important role in the rehabilitation of refugees, it would be incorrect to assume that the government alone deserves all the credit for it.<sup>xxviii</sup> Most Punjabi refugees eventually became self-reliant. As soon as they left the refugee camps, they resolved to stand on their own feet. They were eager to strengthen their lives economically as quickly as possible. During the survey, many

refugees expressed the belief that their arrival at this place was determined by fate and that there was no reason to blame anyone else for these circumstances. They felt that the devastation they had suffered was a part of the will of the Almighty God and that human beings must accept and follow whatever destiny He ordains for His people.<sup>xxix</sup> In this context, a scholar named Stephen Keller conducted research on the refugees who settled in Punjab and Haryana. Although his research was primarily based on psychological perspectives, it has been helpful in understanding the economic progress of the displaced people. According to Keller, refugees who manage to survive great tragedies often develop a sense of mental invulnerability. This feeling gives them the belief that they have been spared by divine will for a greater purpose. As a result, the storms and shocks of adversity no longer intimidate them. Instead, this sense of resilience pushes them to acquire greater strength and success. To achieve this, refugees actively engage in trade and related economic activities with great enthusiasm, which generates a strong drive for advancement. This situation creates a sense of competition between the refugees and the host population. However, in many cases the refugees tend to succeed in such competition. Keller regarded the contribution of refugees to the development of the states of Punjab and Haryana as a clear indicator of their economic progress.<sup>xxx</sup> Punjabi refugees generally do not remain entangled in the hardships of the past; rather, they are filled with strong determination to move forward and built a better future. They often repeat a popular saying in Punjabi that reflects the spirit.

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खांदा-पींदा लाये दा

बाकी अहमद शाहे दा<sup>xxxii</sup>

"What we eat and drink is ours, the rest is Ahmed Shah's<sup>xxxii</sup> (the plunderer)." Meaning, what we eat and drink is truly ours; even if the rest is looted, it doesn't matter. This mindset gives them the courage to face every new situation boldly and approach the future without fear.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

The refugees brought considerable changes to the dressing up styles and fashion prevalent in the town. Earlier, traditional garments such as old style shirts and dhotis were commonly worn. However, with the arrival of refugees Western style shirts and trousers soon became popular and began replacing older

forms of dress in many parts of Haryana, particularly in places like Rohtak (Sonipat was a tehsil of Rohtak district at that time). The traditional attire of Punjabi women, especially the *salwar-kameez*, became highly popular among local women who used to wear the traditional flared skirt *daman* and *kurti* (shirt). Although the *sari* was once commonly used, it is now generally worn only on special occasions. In towns and cities, women from the Brahmin and *Bania* community still prefer wearing *sari*.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Local women imitated the jewelry and make up styles of displaced women. Earlier local women wore heavy jewelry, but it became obsolete and replaced by lighter jewelry. Previously, *purdah* system was prevalent and had become an integral part of women's lives in Haryana. However, new forms of education, employment, and contact with displaced persons, socio-economic changes, and urbanization significantly reduced the prevalence of *purdah*.<sup>xxxv</sup> Education and employment empowered women with self-reliance and self-confidence, and brought about social change. Women who previously wouldn't leave their homes were now seen traveling around the cities with friends, riding bicycles, and dining at restaurants and public places. This fostered confidence, assertiveness and self-respect.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

In the beginning, the refugees were hostile to the local culture, but gradually their attitudes changed as the local people embraced their culture. *Khatri*s and *Aroras* engaged in trade learned the local language to attract customers.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Those refugees who understood the benefits of education admitted their children to schools, colleges, and vocational institutions. Charitable trust, Rotary Club, Sonipat (1957), Lions Club (1973) etc. were also established.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

There was a noticeable change in the town's dietary habits, personal hygiene and transport system. An 85 year old resident of Model Town, Sonipat, Sh.Surender Nijhawan, who came to Sonipat from Shorkut (Jhang district) Pakistan, told the author that the local inhabitants did not usually include vegetables in their meals, a practice which they later learned from the refugees. Apart from this the local people had limited hygiene awareness. They did not use soap and washed their clothes very infrequently. It was the refugees who first taught them the use of soap.<sup>xxxix</sup> A wide variety of fruits and vegetables began to be consumed,

although the local people initially followed a simple vegetarian diet influenced by Arya Samaj. As this influence declined, non-vegetarian food gradually became part of their meals. Items like ice-cream, lemonade and aerated drinks also became popular. Transportation evolved from mainly walking and tongas to rickshaws, auto-rickshaws, scooters and bicycles, which improved mobility and created employment.<sup>xi</sup>

The partition of India also brought a noticeable change in the structure and use of religious places in Sonipat. Before partition, there was a mosque in Sonipat known as the Badi Masjid near Geeta Bhawan Chowk, which served as the main mosque of the town at that time. On the basis of its architectural features, it can be concluded that the mosque dates back to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>xii</sup> However, during partition, when the Muslim population of Sonipat migrated from the area, the Hindus who remained in the town got this mosque converted into a Durga temple. The external structure of the building was not significantly altered, and even today it remains surrounded by two large minarets.<sup>HARAN GUPT)</sup>

Thus, the influence of refugees on the local population proved beneficial in several ways. In various aspects of life, laziness was replaced by hard work, and sluggishness gave way to greater energy and efficiency. Today, men and women of this region appear more refined, better dressed, and more presentable. In this way, despite the tragedy partition also brought a ray of hope to South East Punjab (i.e. Haryana). It helped bring together people speaking different dialects, holding diverse perspectives, and belonging to different cultural backgrounds into a shared social framework. The development of agriculture, trade, transportation, education, and industry further contributed to the modernization of society.<sup>xiii</sup>

## **7. Conclusion**

The partition of India in 1947 brought considerable demographic, social, economic and cultural changes to Sonipat, transforming it from a relatively traditional town of Haryana into a more dynamic and diverse society. The large-scale migration of refugees from West Pakistan not only altered the population structure but also triggered a challenging process of rehabilitation and resettlement. The displaced people were gradually integrated into the local economy and society through government initiatives such as land

redistribution, housing schemes, loans and relief measures along with the efforts of voluntary organizations. Despite the immense trauma and loss they had suffered, the displaced people showed remarkable resilience, determination and entrepreneurship spirit in rebuilding their lives.

The influx of migrants led to the modernization of agriculture, trade and industry in the region. Their experience with modern farming techniques, mechanized agriculture and commercial enterprise enhanced productivity and stimulated economic growth. The setting up of markets, small industries, and enterprises like the Atlas Cycle factory further strengthened the economic base of Sonipat. Simultaneously, the interaction between refugees and the local populace triggered significant cultural and social transformations, influencing food habits, dressing style, language, gender roles and social outlook.

Thus, while partition was one of the most tragic and violent episodes in the Indian subcontinent history, its long-term consequences in places like Sonipat involved the processes of social change and reconstruction. The settlement of refugees not only transformed the demography and economic structure of the town but also encouraged modernization and integration in the region. The developments in Sonipat between 1947 and 1965 shows how a community, in spite of deep trauma and displacement, was able to successfully rebuild itself and played a vital role in the transformation of North India after independence.

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**Popular Fiction as Social Commentary: A Cultural Study Approaches with  
Special Reference to Five Point Someone by Chetan Bhagat**

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**Abstract**

Popular fiction has long occupied an ambiguous space within literary scholarship—simultaneously dismissed as mere entertainment and celebrated as a powerful vehicle for cultural expression and social critique. This paper examines the intersections of popular fiction and social commentary through a cultural studies framework, with particular reference to Chetan Bhagat's debut novel *Five Point Someone: What Not to Do at IIT* (2004). Drawing on theoretical perspectives from Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu, Homi K. Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this study interrogates how Bhagat's novel functions not merely as a campus narrative but as a sophisticated cultural text that decodes the ideological apparatus of the Indian education system, hegemonic class aspirations, neoliberal pressures on youth identity, and the contested terrain of postcolonial modernity. The paper explores how mass-market fiction, often undervalued in academic discourse, can serve as a democratic platform through which subaltern anxieties and collective social frustrations are articulated and negotiated. Through close textual analysis and intertextual engagement with Indian cultural history, the paper argues that *Five Point Someone* is a significant site where popular culture and social criticism converge, offering readers—particularly Indian middle-class youth—both a mirror of their lived realities and an implicit critique of the systems that govern those realities. The study also addresses questions of genre, readership, commodification of literature, and the politics of literary gatekeeping in the Indian publishing landscape.

**Keywords:** Popular fiction, social commentary, cultural studies, Five Point Someone, Chetan Bhagat, Indian literature, education system, postcolonial identity, neoliberalism, middle class

## 1. Introduction: Popular Fiction and the Question of Cultural Value

The relationship between popular fiction and social commentary is one of the most contested and productive debates in contemporary literary and cultural studies. For decades, the academy has maintained an often uneasy hierarchy between 'literary' or 'serious' fiction and 'popular' or 'mass-market' fiction, a binary that has been rigorously questioned by cultural theorists and postcolonial scholars alike. This hierarchical division is not merely aesthetic; it is deeply ideological, reflecting structures of cultural capital, class, and institutional power that determine which texts are deemed worthy of scholarly attention and which are consigned to the margins of critical discourse (Bourdieu, 1984).

In the Indian context, this debate has acquired a distinctive urgency since the early 2000s, when a new wave of popular Anglophone fiction—spearheaded by writers such as Chetan Bhagat, Amish Tripathi, and Durjoy Datta—dramatically altered the landscape of Indian publishing. Among these, Chetan Bhagat occupies a singular position. His debut novel, *Five Point Someone: What Not to Do at IIT* (2004), became not merely a bestseller but a cultural phenomenon, selling over three million copies in India alone and spawning a critically acclaimed Bollywood adaptation, *3 Idiots* (2009), directed by Rajkumar Hirani. The novel's unprecedented commercial success challenged longstanding assumptions about readership, literary value, and the social function of fiction in contemporary India (Mehrotra, 2014).

This paper argues that *Five Point Someone* is far more than a comic campus novel. It is a richly layered cultural text that performs sustained and sophisticated social commentary on the Indian education system, middle-class aspirations, youth alienation, gender dynamics, and the contradictions of postcolonial modernity. By reading the novel through a cultural studies lens—

drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Hall (1980), Williams (1977), Bourdieu (1984), Bhabha (1994), and Spivak (1988)—this study demonstrates how popular fiction can function as a democratic and accessible vehicle for the articulation of social critique, often more effectively than its 'literary' counterparts because of its mass readership and its embeddedness in the lived cultures of everyday life.

The paper proceeds as follows: after a review of relevant theoretical frameworks (Section 2), it provides contextual background on the Indian popular fiction landscape and Bhagat's emergence as a cultural figure (Section 3). Sections 4 through 8 offer detailed analyses of the novel's social commentary across several thematic domains: the education system and meritocracy, class and aspiration, gender and patriarchy, postcolonial identity, and neoliberal subjectivity. Section 9 examines the politics of reception and the commodification of popular fiction before the conclusion synthesizes the study's findings.

## 2. Theoretical Frameworks: Cultural Studies, Popular Fiction, and Social Critique

### 2.1 Cultural Studies and the Politics of Representation

Cultural studies, as it emerged from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the 1960s and 1970s, fundamentally reconfigured the relationship between culture, power, and everyday life. Rejecting the Arnoldian tradition that reserved the term 'culture' for the highest achievements of civilization, scholars such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall insisted on understanding culture as 'a whole way of life'—a set of practices, meanings, and values through which people make sense of their social existence (Williams, 1958, p. 325). This democratization of the concept of culture opened the way for serious scholarly engagement with popular and mass culture, including popular fiction.

Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980) is particularly valuable for understanding the social function of popular texts. Hall argued that cultural texts encode dominant ideological

meanings, but that audiences are not passive recipients of those meanings—they can negotiate or even resist the preferred readings encoded in texts. In the context of popular fiction, this suggests that a novel like *Five Point Someone* both encodes and enables the decoding of dominant social ideologies: it can simultaneously reinforce and subvert the hegemonic values it appears to celebrate.

Raymond Williams's concept of 'structures of feeling' (1977) is equally useful here. Williams argued that literature captures the lived, affective dimensions of social experience—the felt quality of life in a particular time and place—in ways that formal sociological analysis cannot. Popular fiction, precisely because of its mass readership and its embeddedness in everyday culture, is particularly well-positioned to give expression to emerging structures of feeling: the anxieties, aspirations, and discontents that characterize a society in transition. In the India of the early 2000s, marked by the liberalization of the economy, the expansion of the information technology sector, and the rise of a new consumerist middle class, *Five Point Someone* gave voice to precisely such an emerging structure of feeling.

## 2.2 Bourdieu, Cultural Capital, and the Field of Cultural Production

Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and the field of cultural production provide a powerful analytical framework for understanding both the content and the reception of popular fiction (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). For Bourdieu, the literary field is structured by a fundamental opposition between 'restricted' production—literary fiction aimed at other producers and consecrated by academic and critical institutions—and 'large-scale' production—popular fiction aimed at the mass market. This structural opposition maps onto hierarchies of taste and cultural legitimacy that are themselves rooted in class relations.

Applying Bourdieu's framework to *Five Point Someone* illuminates several things. First, it helps explain the disdain with which Bhagat's work has been received by sections of the Indian literary establishment, who have dismissed his prose style as 'simple' or 'derivative' (Anjaria, 2012).

Second, and more importantly, it reveals how the novel itself thematizes these very hierarchies of cultural capital. The IIT (Indian Institute of Technology) functions in the novel as an institution that promises to convert educational achievement into social and economic capital, but the novel exposes the ways in which this promise is systematically distorted by a culture of rote learning and examination performance that privileges compliance over creativity.

### 2.3 Postcolonial Perspectives: Bhabha and Spivak

Postcolonial theory offers a further dimension of analysis. Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry (1994) are relevant to understanding the cultural positioning of characters in the novel, who are caught between the colonial inheritance of the IIT system—itsself modeled on elite British engineering institutions—and the demands of an indigenous cultural identity. The students in *Five Point Someone* perform a kind of mimicry of the ideal IIT student—disciplined, academically superior, oriented toward professional success—while simultaneously subverting this ideal through their resistance, friendship, and unconventional choices.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential intervention on the question of who can speak, and whose voices are heard in the production and reception of cultural texts, is also germane (Spivak, 1988). While *Five Point Someone* gives voice to the experiences of a specific demographic—upper-middle-class urban Indian males—Spivak's framework prompts us to ask whose experiences are absent from the text, and what that absence reveals about the ideological limits of popular fiction as a mode of social commentary. The paper returns to this question in Section 8.

### 3. Context: Indian Popular Fiction and the Bhagat Phenomenon

The emergence of Chetan Bhagat as a literary and cultural phenomenon must be understood against the backdrop of profound transformations in Indian society and the Indian publishing industry in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The liberalization of the Indian economy, initiated in 1991, had by the early 2000s produced a rapidly expanding urban middle class with rising disposable incomes and

a voracious appetite for consumer goods, including books (Fernandes, 2006). At the same time, the IT boom had made English a crucial vehicle of social mobility, producing a large readership for Anglophone fiction that was literate in English but not necessarily steeped in the traditions of metropolitan literary culture.

Into this context came *Five Point Someone*, published by Rupa Publications in 2004. The novel was revolutionary in several respects. First, it was written in a simple, colloquial English that was accessible to readers for whom English was a second or even a third language. Second, it dealt with subject matter—the lives and anxieties of students at the IIT—that was immediately recognizable and resonant for a large segment of the Indian middle class, for whom admission to the IITs represented the pinnacle of educational aspiration. Third, it was priced accessibly, making it available to a much wider readership than the expensive hardcover editions that dominated the Indian literary fiction market (Bhatt, 2015).

Bhagat himself has been explicit about his populist literary ambitions. In numerous interviews, he has described his goal as writing books that can be bought at railway stations and read on train journeys—books that speak to ordinary Indians rather than to a metropolitan cultural elite. This democratic literary vision has earned him both mass popularity and critical disdain, a paradox that is itself deeply revealing of the class politics of cultural production in India (Mukherjee, 2011).

Critically, *Five Point Someone* was not simply a commercial success; it was a cultural catalyst. The novel sparked a national conversation about the IIT system, the culture of competitive examination, and the treatment of students who fail to perform at the highest levels. It also inaugurated a new genre of Indian campus fiction that has since produced numerous successors, from Bhagat's own subsequent novels to a host of imitators. Its adaptation into the hugely successful film *3 Idiots* (2009) only amplified its cultural reach and impact (Dissanayake, 2012).

#### 4. The Education System as Site of Social Critique

#### 4.1 Meritocracy and Its Discontents

At the heart of *Five Point Someone* lies a sustained critique of the Indian education system, and in particular of the culture of competitive examination that governs access to elite institutions like the IITs. The novel's central characters—Hari Kumar, Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta—are students at IIT Delhi who find themselves trapped by a system that reduces the entirety of their educational experience to a single metric: the grade point average (GPA), or in the novel's terminology, the 'five point' scale. The novel's title itself encodes this critique: the characters' 'five point' GPAs—mediocre by IIT standards—mark them as failures in a system that admits of only one form of success.

The ideological critique implicit in this narrative is profound. The Indian education system, particularly at the level of elite institutions like the IITs, presents itself as the ultimate meritocracy—a pure competition in which the most talented and hardworking students rise to the top, regardless of their socioeconomic background. *Five Point Someone* systematically dismantles this meritocratic myth. Through the character of Alok Gupta, whose family's financial precarity forces him into a state of constant academic anxiety, the novel shows how the supposedly neutral measure of academic performance is in fact deeply inflected by class position (Kamdar, 2008).

Moreover, the novel interrogates the content of what is being measured. The education dispensed at IIT in the novel is not a cultivation of genuine intellectual curiosity or creative problem-solving but a relentless drilling in examination technique, a process of cramming and regurgitation that has little to do with actual learning or understanding. Ryan's repeated insistence that the system suppresses creativity and original thinking—and his attempts, however chaotic and destructive, to resist this suppression—voices a critique of rote learning and examination culture that resonates far beyond the IIT context to encompass the Indian education system as a whole (Nambisan, 2010).

#### 4.2 The Panopticon of Academic Surveillance

Michel Foucault's concept of the panopticon—the disciplinary mechanism through which subjects internalize the regulatory gaze of authority and police their own behaviour—is illuminating in this context (Foucault, 1977). The IIT in Five Point Someone functions as a kind of academic panopticon. Students are under constant surveillance: their attendance is monitored, their academic performance is continuously assessed, and their standing in the institution is perpetually at risk. The threat of expulsion or rustication—which looms over the protagonists throughout the novel—functions as a mechanism of discipline that keeps students in a state of constant anxiety and compliance.

The novel's antagonist, Professor Cherian, embodies this disciplinary apparatus. His role in the narrative is not merely that of a personal adversary to the protagonists; he is the human face of a systemic logic of surveillance and control that reduces students to quantifiable units of academic output. His vindictiveness and his abuse of institutional power are presented not as individual pathologies but as symptoms of a deeper institutional culture of authoritarianism and hierarchy. In this sense, the novel's critique of the education system extends beyond pedagogy to encompass the broader structures of power and authority that govern institutional life in India.

#### 5. Class, Aspiration, and the Middle-Class Predicament

Five Point Someone is, among other things, a novel about the aspirations and anxieties of the Indian middle class. The three protagonists represent different positions within this class formation. Ryan Oberoi comes from an affluent upper-middle-class family and possesses the social and cultural capital—including a confident relationship with English, a comfortable material life, and a sense of entitlement—that cushions his academic failures. Hari Kumar occupies a more middling position: his family is respectable but not wealthy, and his academic performance at IIT is a matter of some consequence for his social standing. Alok Gupta's situation is the most precarious: his family's

financial difficulties mean that his academic success is not merely a matter of personal ambition but of family survival.

Through these three characters, the novel maps the internal differentiation of the Indian middle class and the different ways in which its members experience the pressures and contradictions of aspiration. The concept of aspiration is central here: the middle class is defined not merely by its current socioeconomic position but by its orientation toward a future of upward mobility, a future that in post-liberalization India is increasingly mediated by credentials, particularly the kind of elite technical and professional credentials that the IITs are meant to dispense (Fernandes, 2006).

The novel's treatment of Alok's family situation is particularly powerful as social commentary. The subplot involving Alok's disabled father and his family's financial dependence on his future earnings as an IIT graduate dramatizes the enormous weight of social expectation that bears down on young people from lower-middle-class backgrounds who manage to gain entry into elite institutions. This weight is not merely psychological but profoundly material: for Alok, failure at IIT would be a catastrophe not just for himself but for his entire family. The novel's sympathy for Alok's plight is also, implicitly, a critique of a social system that places such crushing burdens on individuals while offering them so few structural supports (Mitra, 2016).

The novel also engages with the phenomenon of what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'social reproduction': the tendency of educational systems to reproduce existing class hierarchies under the guise of meritocratic competition. While the IIT is presented as an institution that is nominally open to talent from all social backgrounds, the novel repeatedly suggests that the social and cultural capital required to thrive there—the confidence, the English-language fluency, the familiarity with Western scientific and technical culture—is unevenly distributed along class lines, giving a systematic advantage to students from more privileged backgrounds.

## 6. Gender Dynamics and Patriarchal Structures

Gender is a significant but underexplored dimension of Five Point Someone's social commentary. The novel is set in an overwhelmingly male environment—the IIT—and its three protagonists are all male. Women appear primarily as objects of desire (Neha Cheria, the professor's daughter) or as peripheral figures in the domestic sphere (Alok's mother, the protagonists' female relatives). This representational economy reflects the actual gender composition of the IITs in the early 2000s, where women constituted a tiny minority of the student body, but it also reflects broader patriarchal structures in Indian society.

The character of Neha Cheria is the most fully developed female character in the novel, and she functions in several analytically interesting ways. On one level, the romance between Hari and Neha follows a conventional Bollywood narrative arc: the rebellious young man wins the heart of the beautiful girl against the opposition of her disapproving father. On another level, however, Neha represents a form of female agency within patriarchal constraints. Her relationship with Hari is conducted in secret, against her father's explicit wishes, and involves a degree of independence and self-determination that is significant given the context.

Nevertheless, from a feminist perspective, the novel's treatment of gender is troublingly conventional. Neha's primary function in the narrative is as a romantic prize and as a catalyst for Hari's personal development. She has no independent plot arc, no professional ambitions, and no engagement with the intellectual or institutional life of the IIT. Her father's authoritarianism is presented as a personal failing rather than as a symptom of wider patriarchal structures, and the resolution of the romantic plot—Neha and Hari's relationship is ultimately validated—does not challenge but rather recuperates conventional heteronormative romance narratives (Krishnaswamy, 2009).

The near-total absence of female students from the IIT world depicted in the novel is itself a form of social commentary, though it may be an unintentional one. The IITs' historical failure to

attract and retain female students reflects a broader pattern of gender discrimination in Indian higher education that has been extensively documented (Sedwal & Kamat, 2008). By setting the novel in an overwhelmingly male environment and treating this environment as natural and unremarkable, *Five Point Someone* both reflects and implicitly normalizes the exclusion of women from elite technical education.

### 7. Postcolonial Identity and the Legacy of Colonial Education

The IIT system in India has a complex postcolonial genealogy. Established in the 1950s under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's development agenda, the IITs were modeled on elite Western—and particularly British—technical institutions and were intended to produce a cadre of technically trained personnel who would drive India's industrialization and modernization. This origin story encodes a particular vision of modernity: one that is explicitly indebted to Western scientific and technical rationality, and that implicitly positions India's development as a process of catching up with the West (Krishnan, 1997).

*Five Point Someone* engages with this postcolonial inheritance in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. On one hand, the novel's valorization of technical education and of the IIT as an institution implicitly endorses the developmentalist vision of modernity that the IITs represent. On the other hand, the novel's critique of the IIT's pedagogical culture—its authoritarianism, its suppression of creativity, its reduction of education to examination performance—implicitly questions the Western model of technical rationality that the IIT is meant to embody.

Bhabha's concept of mimicry is particularly relevant here (Bhabha, 1994). The IIT, as an institution, performs a mimicry of elite Western technical education, replicating its structures, its curricula, and its institutional culture while transposing them into a distinctively Indian social context. The students in the novel perform a further mimicry: they are expected to become 'almost but not quite' the ideal Western-educated engineer—disciplined, rational, technically proficient—

while remaining recognizably Indian. The protagonists' failure to achieve this ideal is presented not as a personal deficiency but as a symptom of the fundamental incoherence of this mimetic project.

The cultural hybridity that Bhabha theorizes is also visible in the novel's representation of everyday campus life: the mix of Hindi and English in the characters' speech, the juxtaposition of Indian domestic and family pressures with the supposedly impersonal rationality of the academic environment, and the complex negotiation between traditional values and modernizing aspirations that characterizes the characters' personal lives. This hybridity is not presented as a problem to be resolved but as the lived reality of postcolonial subjects navigating modernity on multiple fronts simultaneously (Gopal, 2009).

#### 8. Neoliberal Subjectivity, Youth Identity, and Alienation

Five Point Someone is, in significant part, a novel about the formation of neoliberal subjectivity among Indian youth in the early 2000s. The concept of neoliberal subjectivity refers to the mode of selfhood that is produced and valorized by neoliberal economic and social policy: the self as entrepreneur, as human capital, as a site of continuous self-investment and self-optimization oriented toward market success (Harvey, 2005). The IIT, in the novel, functions as a machine for the production of this kind of subjectivity: its students are trained—or rather, pressured—to understand themselves as human capital whose value is determined by their GPA and their subsequent earning power.

The novel's protagonists resist this neoliberal self-formation in various ways. Ryan's unconventional intellectual interests—his fascination with practical engineering problems rather than examination performance—represent a refusal of the reduction of intellectual life to market value. His invention of the mug sniffer in the novel (though ultimately weaponized against its creators) is a symbol of the creative, non-instrumental intelligence that the IIT system suppresses. Hari's gradual development from a passive conformist to someone capable of making ethically and personally

meaningful choices represents a more conventional Bildungsroman narrative of individual self-formation that nevertheless implicitly critiques the impersonal logic of the examination machine.

The theme of alienation runs throughout the novel. In the Marxist tradition, alienation refers to the estrangement of workers from the products of their labour, from their own creative capacities, and from each other (Marx, 1844/1988). The students in *Five Point Someone* experience a form of educational alienation: their intellectual labour—the countless hours spent studying—produces outcomes (grades, degrees) that are entirely controlled by the institution and whose value is entirely determined by the market. They have little sense of ownership over their own learning, little intrinsic motivation for their studies, and little connection between the content of their education and their actual interests and aspirations.

The friendship between the three protagonists—the novel's emotional and moral centre—can be read as a response to this alienation. In a social environment that is fundamentally competitive and individualistic, the solidarity of their friendship represents an alternative set of values: loyalty, mutual support, and a shared resistance to the dehumanizing logic of the institution. This valorization of friendship and solidarity as a counter-hegemonic practice has deep resonances in Indian cultural and philosophical traditions, even as it also draws on familiar tropes of Western coming-of-age fiction (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994).

It is important to acknowledge the representational limitations of the novel in this context. The experience of neoliberal subjectivity and educational alienation depicted in *Five Point Someone* is a specifically gendered, classed, and caste-located experience. The protagonists are all upper-caste or at least socially dominant-caste Hindu males from urban backgrounds whose social position gives them a degree of cultural familiarity with the IIT environment that is not available to students from lower-caste or rural backgrounds. The novel's failure to engage with caste as a structural determinant of educational experience is a significant omission that limits the scope of its social commentary, a

point that returns us to Spivak's question of whose voices are heard and whose are silenced in popular cultural texts (Spivak, 1988).

### 9. The Politics of Reception: Popular Fiction, Cultural Gatekeeping, and Democratic Literature

The reception of *Five Point Someone* in India exemplifies the cultural politics of popular fiction in a postcolonial context. The novel was embraced by millions of readers—particularly young, urban, English-reading Indians—with an enthusiasm that the Indian literary establishment found difficult to comprehend or accommodate. Critical responses ranged from dismissive—focusing on the novel's plain prose style, its narrative conventionality, and its apparent simplicity—to celebratory accounts of its democratic accessibility and its cultural resonance (Anjaria, 2012).

The dismissive critical response to *Five Point Someone* is itself a form of cultural gatekeeping that reproduces the very class dynamics that the novel critiques. When critics accuse the novel of being 'too simple' or 'not literary enough,' they are deploying criteria of literary value—stylistic sophistication, formal complexity, intertextual density—that are themselves products of a specific cultural training available primarily to those with high levels of cultural capital. The implicit assumption is that the only literature worth taking seriously is literature that addresses readers who already possess this cultural capital: that is, a relatively small educated elite. Literature that speaks to a mass readership in accessible terms is, by definition, not serious literature (Bourdieu, 1984).

This critical stance is particularly problematic in a postcolonial context, where the gatekeepers of literary value are often applying criteria derived from metropolitan Western literary traditions to texts that operate in very different cultural contexts and address very different readerships. Bhagat's deliberate choice of a simple, colloquial prose style can be read not as a failure of literary craft but as a political decision: a conscious rejection of the elitist cultural codes that define 'literary' fiction in favour of a mode of address that is genuinely accessible to a mass readership (Mukherjee, 2011).

The sociologist John Fiske's concept of 'popular productivity'—the capacity of popular cultural texts to generate meanings and pleasures that exceed the intentions of their producers—is useful here (Fiske, 1989). The phenomenal popular success of *Five Point Someone*, and in particular the passionate identification of millions of young Indian readers with its characters and their experiences, suggests that the novel tapped into a reservoir of social experience and feeling that was not being addressed by more 'literary' modes of fiction. This popular productivity is itself a form of cultural value that the literary establishment's criteria are ill-equipped to recognize or assess.

The conversion of *Five Point Someone* into the Bollywood film *3 Idiots* (2009) raises additional questions about the relationship between popular fiction and other popular cultural forms. The film, which substantially altered the novel's plot and deepened its social critique of the education system, reached audiences far beyond those who had read the book, and its cultural impact—which included public statements from senior politicians and educators about the need for educational reform—demonstrated the capacity of popular cultural texts to intervene in public discourse in ways that are not available to more exclusively 'literary' works. This transmedia dimension of the novel's cultural life is an important part of its function as social commentary (Dissanayake, 2012).

#### 10. *Five Point Someone* in the Context of Indian Literary Tradition

To fully appreciate *Five Point Someone* as a work of social commentary, it is necessary to situate it within the broader context of Indian literary tradition, both in English and in vernacular languages. Indian literature has a long tradition of social engagement and critique, from the reformist fiction of the nineteenth century—figures like Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore—through the progressive writers' movement of the 1930s and 1940s, to the postcolonial literature that emerged after independence. This tradition has consistently used literary forms to interrogate social hierarchies, challenge orthodoxies, and give voice to marginalized experiences (Mukherjee, 2000).

Bhagat's novel both inherits and departs from this tradition. It inherits the tradition's commitment to social engagement and its democratic orientation—its address to a broad popular readership rather than an elite audience. It departs from it in its comic tone, its lack of formal experimentation, and its relatively uncomplicated narrative structure. In this sense, *Five Point Someone* represents a new kind of socially engaged popular fiction: one that achieves its critical effects not through formal complexity or aesthetic difficulty but through the immediacy and accessibility of its social diagnosis.

Comparisons with other Indian campus novels are instructive. The genre of campus fiction has a significant history in Hindi and other vernacular literatures, and Bhagat's novel can be read as bringing this tradition into the Anglophone domain while also adapting it to the specific conditions of the post-liberalization urban middle class. At the same time, the novel's engagement with the IIT—an institution with a specific cultural and social significance in contemporary India—gives it a topicality and cultural specificity that distinguishes it from more generic campus fiction (Kapur, 2009).

#### 11. Conclusion: Popular Fiction as Democratic Social Critique

This paper has argued that *Five Point Someone* by Chetan Bhagat is a significant work of popular fiction that functions as effective and multifaceted social commentary. Through a cultural studies framework that draws on the theoretical resources of Hall, Williams, Bourdieu, Bhabha, and Spivak, the paper has demonstrated how the novel encodes and enables critique across a range of social domains: the ideology of meritocracy and the contradictions of the Indian education system; the class dynamics and aspirational anxieties of the Indian middle class; the patriarchal structures that shape gender relations in elite institutional spaces; the postcolonial legacies that inflect Indian modernity; and the neoliberal pressures on youth identity and subjectivity.

The paper has also argued that the dismissal of Five Point Someone by sections of the literary establishment reflects the class politics of cultural gatekeeping rather than a neutral or objective assessment of the novel's literary or social value. The novel's accessibility—its plain prose style, its familiar narrative conventions, its direct address to a mass readership—is not a deficit but a strength: it is precisely this accessibility that enables the novel to function as a democratic platform for social commentary, reaching audiences and giving voice to experiences that more 'literary' modes of fiction cannot.

At the same time, the paper has been attentive to the limits of the novel's social critique. Its failure to engage with caste as a structural determinant of educational experience, its marginalization of female characters and perspectives, and its focus on a relatively privileged demographic within the Indian middle class all represent significant limitations on its capacity to function as comprehensive social commentary. These limitations remind us that popular fiction, like all cultural forms, is embedded in specific social positions and speaks from specific subject positions: it can illuminate certain aspects of social reality while remaining blind to others.

These limitations notwithstanding, Five Point Someone represents a significant intervention in Indian cultural and social life, one whose effects—including the national conversation it sparked about educational reform—demonstrate the capacity of popular fiction to function as more than mere entertainment. In a cultural moment defined by the simultaneous expansion of literacy and the fragmentation of the public sphere, popular fiction may be one of the few cultural forms with the reach and accessibility to function as a genuinely democratic mode of social commentary. The cultural study of popular fiction—including works like Five Point Someone that are often dismissed by the literary establishment—is therefore not merely an academic exercise but a contribution to the broader project of understanding and critically engaging with the culture of our time.

Future research might productively extend this analysis by examining the reception of Five Point Someone among different readership demographics, including students from non-IIT backgrounds, female readers, and readers from lower-caste and rural backgrounds. Comparative studies with other works of Indian campus fiction, or with popular fiction that addresses similar social themes in other postcolonial contexts, would also be valuable in situating Five Point Someone within a broader global conversation about the social functions of popular literature.

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## **Ecofeminism in Modern Indian Literature: Gender, Ecology, and Resistance in a Postcolonial Framework**

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### **Abstract**

Ecofeminism has emerged as one of the most influential interdisciplinary frameworks for understanding the interconnected structures of ecological degradation and gender oppression. By linking environmental exploitation with patriarchal systems of domination, ecofeminism offers a critical lens to examine how power operates across both human and non-human domains. This research paper investigates the manifestation of ecofeminist thought in modern Indian literature, situating literary texts within broader socio-political, cultural, and ecological contexts. Drawing upon the theoretical contributions of Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, Val Plumwood, and Karen J. Warren, this study examines how Indian writers articulate the relationship between gender, environment, and power structures shaped by colonial and postcolonial histories.

Through detailed textual analysis of works by Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, and Kavery Nambisan, the paper demonstrates how narratives foreground ecological crises alongside the marginalization of women and subaltern communities. It argues that modern Indian literature not only critiques the destructive consequences of capitalist development and environmental exploitation but also reimagines alternative modes of coexistence rooted in sustainability, care, and indigenous epistemologies. By integrating ecofeminist and postcolonial perspectives, this study underscores the role of literature as a site of resistance and ethical reconfiguration in an era of global ecological crisis.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Gender and Ecology, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Environmental Justice, Feminist Theory

## **Introduction**

### **Locating Ecofeminism in Indian Literary Discourse**

The contemporary world is witnessing an unprecedented ecological crisis marked by climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. These crises are not merely scientific or environmental issues but are deeply embedded in socio-political structures that perpetuate inequality and exploitation. Ecofeminism emerges as a critical framework that interrogates these structures by linking the domination of nature with the oppression of women.

The conceptual foundation of ecofeminism rests on the recognition that patriarchal ideologies construct hierarchical binaries—such as man/woman, culture/nature, and reason/emotion—that justify domination. These binaries not only marginalize women but also legitimize the exploitation of the natural world. In this context, ecofeminism seeks to dismantle such dualisms and propose more egalitarian and sustainable modes of existence.

Modern Indian literature provides a fertile ground for exploring ecofeminist concerns. The intersection of colonial history, postcolonial development, and socio-economic disparities creates a complex landscape in which issues of gender and environment are deeply intertwined. Literary texts often reflect the lived realities of marginalized communities, particularly women, who are disproportionately affected by ecological degradation.

This paper argues that ecofeminism in modern Indian literature functions as both a critique of dominant paradigms and a site of resistance. By analyzing selected literary works, the study demonstrates how Indian writers engage with ecofeminist themes to challenge systems of domination and envision alternative futures.

## Literature Review: Mapping Ecofeminist Thought

Ecofeminism, as a theoretical and activist movement, has undergone significant evolution since its inception in the 1970s. The term was first introduced by Françoise d'Eaubonne, who called for a feminist ecological revolution to address environmental crises. Since then, ecofeminism has diversified into multiple strands, including cultural, social, and materialist ecofeminism.

Scholars such as Karen J. Warren have emphasized the philosophical dimensions of ecofeminism, particularly the “logic of domination” that underpins both sexism and environmental exploitation. Warren argues that oppressive conceptual frameworks rely on hierarchical thinking that legitimizes subordination.

Similarly, Val Plumwood critiques dualistic thinking and advocates for an ecological ethic that recognizes the interdependence of all life forms. Her work challenges anthropocentrism and calls for a reconfiguration of human-nature relationships.

In the Indian context, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies have been instrumental in developing a postcolonial ecofeminist framework. Their collaborative work highlights the impact of globalization and capitalist development on ecological systems and women’s livelihoods.

Indian environmental historians like Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil provide important contextual insights into ecological movements, though their work is not explicitly ecofeminist.

Recent literary criticism has increasingly engaged with ecofeminist readings of Indian texts. However, much of this scholarship remains fragmented, focusing on individual authors or texts. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis that integrates theoretical and literary perspectives.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach that combines ecofeminist and postcolonial theoretical frameworks. Ecofeminism provides the primary lens for analyzing the relationship between gender and

environment, while postcolonial theory contextualizes these issues within historical and geopolitical dynamics.

### **Ecofeminist Framework**

Ecofeminism critiques the interconnected systems of domination that exploit both women and nature. According to Karen J. Warren, these systems are sustained by a logic of domination that justifies hierarchical relationships.

### **Postcolonial Framework**

Postcolonial theory examines the legacy of colonialism in shaping contemporary socio-economic and environmental conditions. It highlights issues such as resource extraction, displacement, and cultural marginalization.

### **Methodology**

The research employs:

- Close textual analysis
- Comparative literary analysis
- Theoretical interpretation
- Contextual socio-political analysis

This multi-layered methodology enables a nuanced understanding of ecofeminist themes in Indian literature.

## **Ecofeminism in Indian Cultural and Historical Context**

Ecofeminist thought in India is deeply rooted in cultural traditions that emphasize the interconnectedness of humans and nature. The conceptualization of nature as feminine is evident in religious and cultural practices, where rivers, forests, and the earth are personified as goddesses.

The Chipko Movement serves as a powerful example of ecofeminist praxis. Women's active participation in protecting forests highlights their role as custodians of ecological balance.

Unlike Western ecofeminism, Indian ecofeminism is grounded in material realities. It focuses on issues such as subsistence, livelihood, and community survival. This distinction underscores the importance of contextualizing ecofeminist theory within specific cultural and historical settings.

### **Detailed Textual Analysis**

#### **Kamala Markandaya: Ecology, Poverty, and Gender**

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, Kamala Markandaya presents a powerful narrative of agrarian life disrupted by industrialization. The protagonist Rukmani's life is intimately connected to the land, which serves as both a source of sustenance and identity.

The arrival of a tannery symbolizes the intrusion of capitalist development, leading to environmental degradation and social upheaval. Women, in particular, bear the burden of these changes, as they are responsible for maintaining household and agricultural stability.

#### **Arundhati Roy: Ecology and Political Resistance**

Arundhati Roy's works exemplify ecofeminist resistance. In *The God of Small Things*, the polluted river becomes a metaphor for ecological and social decay.

Roy's critique of large-scale development projects highlights the displacement of marginalized communities, particularly women. Her writing underscores the need for alternative development models that prioritize ecological sustainability.

#### **Anita Desai: Psychological and Environmental Intersections**

Anita Desai explores the psychological dimensions of ecofeminism. In *Fire on the Mountain*, the natural landscape mirrors the protagonist's inner emotional state, suggesting a deep interconnection between human and ecological well-being.

### **Kavery Nambisan: Rural Transformation and Ecological Crisis**

In *A Town Like Ours*, Kavery Nambisan examines the impact of modernization on rural communities. The novel critiques the commodification of land and the erosion of traditional ecological knowledge.

### **Ecofeminism and Postcolonial Critique**

Ecofeminism in Indian literature intersects with postcolonial concerns, particularly regarding resource exploitation and environmental injustice. Colonial histories continue to shape contemporary ecological challenges.

### **Contemporary Relevance and Future Directions**

Ecofeminism remains highly relevant in addressing global environmental challenges. Indian literature continues to engage with issues such as climate change and sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

Ecofeminism in modern Indian literature provides a critical framework for understanding the interconnectedness of gender and environmental issues. Through rich narratives, Indian writers challenge systems of domination and envision sustainable futures.

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## **Ajanta Cave Paintings and Aesthetic Expressions**

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### **Abstract**

Among the oldest forms of art, cave paintings can be considered one of the most ancient modes of artistic expression. While several cave paintings exist, the Ajanta cave paintings located on the banks of the Waghora River in Aurangabad District, Maharashtra, India, are the most renowned. It is said that there are thirty caves in Ajanta, of which only five contain paintings. These works are believed to have been created between the 2nd century BCE and the 7th century BCE. The Ajanta cave paintings depict Buddhist religious stories, Apsara figures, scenes of daily life, battle scenes, animals, plants, and various other subjects. Among them, the images of Padmapani Bodhisattva, Apsara figures, Buddha visiting Himbulwat Puram temple are especially well-known. These paintings incorporate numerous aesthetic elements such as the use of colors, three-dimensionality, proportion, design, technical methods, medium application, expression of ideas, composition, linear expression, light and shade, and a sense of completeness. In the history of art, the Ajanta cave paintings occupy a prominent place.

### **Research Framework:**

Research Problem – To examine whether aesthetic expression exists in cave paintings.

Research Objective – To identify and highlight the presence of traditional artistic forms.

Research Hypothesis – Traditional artistic forms are present within the Ajanta cave paintings.

Research Methodology – This research is based on a qualitative study design.

### **Key words:**

Ajanta cave, Bodhisattva, Apsara, Aesthetic, Natural color

### **Ajanta Cave Paintings and Aesthetic Expressions**

Art is always connected with people's life. Art has many forms. One of them is cave painting. In the beginning, paintings were drawn inside caves. Ajanta cave paintings are one of the most important examples. The Ajanta caves are in Maharashtra state, in Aurangabad district, near the Waghora River. These caves are cut into a high hill shaped like a horse-shoe. There are 29 caves, and many paintings are drawn inside them. These paintings were made from the 2nd century BC to the 7th century AD. The paintings show stories about Lord Buddha, pictures of heavenly dancers (Apsaras), daily life scenes, animals, and plants. In 1983, Ajanta caves were accepted as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. They are also protected by the Government of India.

Today, paintings are drawn on canvas, boards, and paper. But in the olden days, paintings were made on cave walls. For this, the rough surface of the mountain rocks was changed and made smooth to draw paintings.

The cave walls were prepared in three different ways before painting:

- Fresco Buvarno method – painting was done before the cement got dry.
- Painting was done after the cement became dry.
- Painting was done after the cement dried, using colors mixed with glue.

The cement mixture used for this was made from many natural things like plant fibers, plant gum, resin, lime stones, cow dung, husk, and thick animal hair. This mixture was applied on the walls, left to dry, and then paintings were drawn on it. This method is called the "Tenja method", and it can be seen in Ajanta cave paintings.

In Buddhist stories, events from the Buddha's life and tales of his various past births have been depicted as paintings in caves. Among the life events, the painting showing the Buddha visiting Himbulwat Puram Temple is considered especially important. The painting depicts the Buddha receiving food at Himbulwat Puram. This painting can be seen in the 17th cave. The Buddha is shown standing on a lotus flower, with a halo behind his head, and a canopy above his head. The Buddha's figure is larger, while the other figures are smaller, indicating that the artist intended to emphasize the Buddha's greatness. The painting also displays the use of bright colors, with yellow used prominently. Additionally, it reflects the characteristics of Gupta art style.

In the Jataka tales about the Buddha's past lives, the figure of "Padmapani Bodhisattva" is shown as particularly important. This painting is found in the first cave and is considered one of the best art among the cave paintings. In the painting, Siddhartha kumara is shown to the left side of Yashoda Devi, gods playing the flute in the sky, and monkeys in the trees are depicted. The Bodhisattva's figure is larger, and the other figures are smaller, emphasizing the prominence of the Buddha. The Buddha's figure is depicted in a "Thiriyanga" stance, with a smiling face, deep emotions, spiritual qualities, and a youthful appearance. His right hand holds a blue lotus flower, and he is adorned with beautiful garments, necklaces, armbands, and a crown, all crafted with fine detail. Yellow is given prominence in the Bodhisattva's figure, while the other figures are painted in darker colors, according to researchers thought. Importantly, the painting also reflects characteristics of the Gupta period art style.

The Apsara painting is found in the 17th cave. This painting is considered to have a connection with the Sigiriya paintings. Features seen in the Sigiriya paintings - such as long eyes, gentle smiles, earrings, necklaces, and side poses - can also be observed in the Ajanta paintings, where Apsara figures are depicted.

The life scenes belong to the 2nd century and are also painted in the second cave. The paintings depict people's daily life, social events, and natural scenes. The compositions are arranged in layers, one above the other. Dark colors have been used. The figures are small, and their faces are shown slightly turned. The paintings are not limited to the walls; they also extend to the ceiling areas.

Not only animals and also plants are depicted as paintings. Figures of animals such as horses and elephants can be seen, often shown together with humans, and are painted in the second cave. The compositions are arranged in layers, one above the other. Delicate colors have been used for the animals. The paintings also show signs of deterioration. All the animals are depicted in side poses. Brownish colors have been given prominence in the paintings.

### **Historical Background of the Ajanta Caves**

In April 1819, a British officer named John Smith was chasing a tiger in the summer season. The tiger ran away and avoided capture by him. Exhausted from the chase, Smith went to a nearby boy who was tending cattle, bought some water, and drank it to relieve his fatigue. The boy told him that there were many caves nearby where tigers lived<sup>56</sup> but people did not go there because they believed

the caves were haunted by spirits. The boy suggested that Smith and his companions should go and see for themselves. Smith listened to the boy and entered one of the caves. Inside, he discovered ancient statues and paintings. Rows of rock-cut structures, which had been hidden for over a thousand years, were brought to the attention of the world by Smith. In one of the caves, which contained paintings of the Buddha, Smith even wrote his name. In total, 29 caves were discovered. These caves discovered by Smith were later named the Ajanta Caves and became famous in India. Each cave, with its large stone halls, statues of the Buddha, and captivating paintings, continues to amaze visitors.

Researchers believe that the reason the paintings here have lasted over 1500 years is due to the techniques and methods used by the artists. The caves are said to have been built in two phases. During the 2nd century BCE, the “Satavahana kings” constructed caves 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15. Later, in the 5th century CE, the “Vakataka kings” (referred to here as Hadisena) created more than twenty additional caves.

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### Artistic Features of the Ajanta Paintings:

- The paintings reflect emotions appropriate to the situation and depict events in a dramatic, theatrical style.
- When showing human or animal figures, the proportions, movement, and lifelike qualities are carefully represented.
- Stories are presented in a continuous narrative style, with a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Natural settings, such as waterfalls, trees, plants, and wild animals are beautifully included.
- Decorative elements, like smoke patterns, floral motifs, elephants, human figures, and birds enhance the artwork.
- Paintings were first outlined in earthy tones and then colored.
- Colors like red, yellow, blue, black and green were used to paint the artworks.
- Dark and bright colors were combined to highlight the foreground and create visual depth.

### Aesthetics of the Ajanta Paintings

Although the Ajanta cave paintings depict many subjects, their aesthetic qualities are particularly important. To understand their beauty, one can consider aspects such as the use of color, proportion

and scale, techniques used, choice of medium, composition of forms, use of lines, expression and overall completeness.

### **Use of Color**

The use of color plays a very important role in expressing beauty in the Ajanta paintings. It is historically significant that paintings created thousands of years ago still retain their vivid colors even today. All the colors used were made from natural materials. Minerals found in the earth, plant, and colors derived from animals played a major role.

For example:

- Red was made from red soil and certain plants like Sinthukumam.
- Yellow came from sources like yellow ochre and turmeric.
- Blue was obtained from indigo or lapis lazuli.
- Green came from natural green stones like malachite.

These colors were mixed with water or natural resins to create the paints used in the artworks.

The colors used in the paintings appear very deep and rich. Each color is applied in multiple layers, so the shade seems to change depending on the angle of light. In this way, color plays an important role in enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the artworks.

### **Techniques Used**

The paintings were created using various artistic techniques. Even though multiple colors were used, they blend naturally without clashing. The methods used to apply the colors helped the paintings last for many years without losing their quality. In fact, the techniques employed centuries ago are the reason the artworks have remained so well-preserved. Through these techniques, the aesthetic qualities of the paintings are clearly expressed.

### **Design and Composition**

The design and composition of the paintings also play an important role in expressing their beauty. Each cave has its own unique style of arrangement. Paintings are placed on interior walls and ceilings

and the curves and varying heights of the caves influence their layout. For example, paintings on upward-curving surfaces create a distinctive appearance. The direction of light entering the cave affects the clarity and perception of the paintings. Changes in natural light can alter how the artwork is seen, offering a new visual experience. Variations in size also enhance the impact of the paintings. Depending on the dimensions of the caves, paintings are designed to be larger or smaller, which further highlights their aesthetic qualities. This careful design increases the artistic effect of the works.

### **Composition of Figures**

The composition of the cave paintings follows an orderly method. Natural scenes, human figures, animals, and birds are all placed in appropriate positions. A key feature is that human figures are drawn larger, while other figures are made smaller. For example, the figure of the Bodhisattva is shown prominently. The scenes are arranged one above the other, allowing multiple events or stories to be presented on a single wall. Through this composition, the artist tried to convey many narratives within the same space. In this way, the aesthetic qualities of the paintings are also revealed.

### **Use of Lines**

The use of lines can be clearly seen in the Ajanta cave paintings. The lines appear lively and vibrant, giving the figures a realistic and direct appearance. Because of this, lines hold great importance in the paintings. Since every artwork shows the use of lines, they play a key role in bringing out the aesthetic qualities of the paintings.

### **Expression of Emotions**

Through the expression of emotions, the Ajanta paintings have touched both artists and researchers for centuries. Even today, they go beyond the influence of time and continue to awaken different feelings in us. The paintings show emotions in many ways. The facial expressions of the characters are drawn with great clarity. For example, sorrow is shown not only through facial features but also through body language, such as a bowed head. The eyes, too, play an important role - sometimes they appear as if they are directly speaking to the viewer.

Colors are also used to express emotions. For example, red symbolizes anger and blue represents sadness. Compassion is seen in the images of the Bodhisattva, while love is expressed in depictions of mothers with children and affectionate couples. Sadness is shown in scenes of separation and loss, and anger in fighting or battle scenes. Spiritual qualities are reflected in the images of the Bodhisattva. In this way, a wide range of emotions is expressed through the paintings. Emotional expression is one of the key elements of aesthetics, and this becomes clear when observing the Ajanta cave paintings.

### **Expression of Ideas**

The paintings were created to express ideas. The Ajanta cave paintings carry deep messages that reflect the stories, religious beliefs, social life, and human emotions of that time. The central theme of the Ajanta paintings is Buddhist philosophy. They depict the life of the Buddha, Jataka tales, and stories of the Bodhisattva. Social life of the past is also revealed - for example, clothing and ornaments show the social status of people. Human emotions, art, literature, culture and traditions are all represented in these paintings. Because of this, the Ajanta paintings not only tell stories but also bring out strong aesthetic qualities through their expression of ideas.

### **Light and Shade**

Light and shade play an important role in the paintings. By showing contrasts of light and shadow, the artists created an effect similar to seeing reflections in water. In the Ajanta paintings, light and shade are used very skillfully to give the artworks a lifelike appearance. Shading gives depth to the paintings, turning flat surfaces into three-dimensional forms. It also removes stiffness and makes the figures appear natural and realistic. Light and shadow are used to express emotions as well, bringing clarity to faces, feet, clothing, bodies and backgrounds. Through this careful use of light and shade, the Ajanta paintings achieve a strong aesthetic effect.

### **Proportion**

In the aesthetics of painting, proportion is considered one of the most important aspects. In the Ajanta cave paintings, proportion is carefully maintained in depictions of humans, birds, animals, and plants. This accurate use of proportion helps the figures to be easily recognizable. For example, both the Bodhisattva figures and animal figures demonstrate proper proportional balance. When proportions are used correctly, the paintings appear realistic and lifelike. If the proportions are not accurate, the natural quality of the artwork is lost. The Ajanta caves show how skillfully the artists applied proportion in their work. Their mastery of proportion strongly contributes to the aesthetic quality of the paintings.

### **Use of Medium**

The use of medium is one of the main aspects of painting. In the Ajanta caves, two kinds of mediums were used - natural and artificial. Colors were prepared from natural sources, while the surface for painting was created on the cave walls.

For example, white pigment was obtained from lime. The rock surfaces of the caves were coated with a cement mixture before the paintings were made. This prepared base helped the colors to last long. Even today, similar methods are used with added materials in modern painting. Thus, the use of medium plays an important role in bringing out the aesthetic quality of the Ajanta paintings.

### **Three-Dimensionality**

One of the key aspects that brings out the beauty in paintings is three-dimensionality. In the Ajanta cave paintings, the three-dimensional quality is clearly visible. Since these paintings are created in a three-dimensional manner, they give the impression of being seen in real life. The lifelike expression of the figures is made possible through this feature. Thus, through three-dimensionality, the aesthetic qualities of the Ajanta paintings are effectively highlighted.

### **Completeness**

A painting is considered to have achieved completeness only when it reaches a state of fullness. Researchers state that the Ajanta cave paintings are examples of paintings that have attained such

completeness. However, since they are ancient works, some parts of them are now seen in a damaged condition. At present, it is noteworthy that archaeologists are preserving and protecting these paintings.

## Conclusion

Although paintings of many religions are found in India, the Ajanta cave paintings that portray Buddhism stand out as especially significant. Through these paintings, religious expression also reflects the patronage and artistic appreciation of the kings. The cave paintings embody the highest level of aesthetic expression. All of these works were created using natural materials, showcasing the artistic skill and knowledge of the ancestors. Undoubtedly, one of the main reasons these paintings continue to captivate us today is the use of colors. The location of the caves also plays an important role, as the paintings were created by carving into the rock surfaces of the caves. The paintings depict a wide range of subjects - religious themes, Apsaras (celestial maidens), scenes of daily life, battles, wars, animals and birds.

To this day, these works are preserved by archaeologists and remain an important source of income for the tourism industry. The caves attract both domestic and international visitors. The events, stories, and artistry presented by our ancestors in the Ajanta cave paintings appear vividly before our eyes, demonstrating the importance of this artistic heritage. Through such works, art can truly be seen as an integral part of life.

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## INDIAN WOMEN: FROM THE MODERN AGE TO THE DIGITAL ERA

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### Abstract

The paper will discuss this revolution of Indian women in education and work, how they have evolved since the modern era, up to the modern digital. The position of Indian women has always been historically bound by patriarchy, but the position started to change with the constitutional guarantees and policy programs that were targeted to encourage education and participation in the working force post-independence. The liberalization of the economy in 1990s further opened opportunities, especially in the service sector; however, there were systemic issues. Following the introduction of the digital revolution, the turning point has been identified as the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) being powerful forces of empowerment. Digital platforms have made education more democratic, designed flexible work patterns, and encouraged entrepreneurship, which helps women to break conventional barriers. Nonetheless, this development has been accompanied by major adversities such as the existence of a digital gender gap, the safety concerns of online society, and the necessity to keep on upskilling in an economic sphere fueled by AI. In this paper, an in-depth study of the current literature will help in analyzing the multi-dimensional impact of these changes. It states that although the digital age presents women with more opportunities than ever before, to make the potential reality, policymakers, industry, and society must work together to establish an inclusive, equitable, and safe digital ecosystem. The dream path will be determined by closing the digital divide and using technology to break the inequalities rooted in years of tradition so that every Indian woman could have access to the benefits of the digital age.

**Keywords:** Indian women, women's empowerment, education, employment, digital era, ICT, gender equality, Digital India, artificial intelligence.

## Introduction

The story of Indian women is of massive change, it is a story of endurance, struggle and incredible improvement in the context of a well-established social and cultural system. The purpose of women in India, over centuries, was limited to the household, their opportunities to education and economic self-sufficiency, strictly restricted by the patriarchal system. With the advent of the modern age especially after independence, a major ideological change emerged. The Indian constitution of 1950 became a document to reckon upon as it ensured that all people were equal and no one could be discriminated against on the basis of sex, hence creating a legal foundation towards a more equal society. It was the time when there was a start to a variety of government policies and programs to enhance female literacy and health, as well as to involve them into the life of the general population (Singh, 2020).

The road between the sworn equality under the constitution and its practical manifestation has been a lengthy and winding process. The second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century recorded a gradual yet consistent rise in female school attendance and the slow diversification of their work beyond agriculture and household work. The Indian economy was liberalized in the 1990s, which served as a breakthrough as numerous services-sector workers were generated, and many educated women found their jobs there (Kumari, 2023). It was a period of apparent change where women had moved into the workplace in more engaging fields such as information technology, banking and education.

Nevertheless, the digital revolution of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought with it the most radical and far reaching changes. The spread of the internet, mobile technology and the digital arena has significantly revolutionized the education and working environment. This online age is a two-fold sword to Indian women. On the one hand, it provides unexampled possibilities to get past geographical, social, and economic boundaries. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been a potent source of empowerment, and access to online learning, remote work, virtual markets and venues of social and political expression (Manoj et al., 2023). Conversely, it has

also introduced new kinds of inequalities, the most notable of them being the digital gender divide when compared to women, especially those in rural and marginalized societies, women are less likely to have access to and use digital technologies (Iyer, 2017).

The paper is an attempt to discover the diverse process of Indian women in relation to education and employment and how the transformations have been established during the era of modernity to the radical changes brought about by the modern digital era. It will synthesize the literature with the current knowledge of the key drivers of change, opportunities created and the challenges that have persisted and emerged. The thesis statement is that despite the fact that the digital transformation can have a gigantic potential when it comes to the acceleration of female empowerment, the positive gains thereof are not evenly distributed so far. The paper will end by studying the future path, specifically in the age of AI-driven economy and emphasize the urgent necessity of inclusive policies to ensure that the digital revolution will turn into the actual and universal empowerment of all Indian women.

## **Literature Review**

### **1. Historical Context and the Dawn of Modern Education**

The pre-modern India was a complicated and varied position of women, depending on the parts of the country and the communities, yet the majority of them were marked by their subordination to the patriarchal system. Formal education was a privilege of a very small elite, and the rest of women were confined to the domestic chores with no or minimal economic and social liberty. The social activists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Savitribai Phule led the social reform movements in the 19 th and early 20 th centuries that promoted the cause of female education as pre-requisite to social progress. This was the preliminary of the intellectual preparation of change, to resist the traditions of the past, and establish women to the right to knowledge.

The period of independence was a way of breaking off with the past and the new government put into place the profession of the gender equality objective through its institutions. New Five-Year

Plans had some objectives of women development and this new vision was put on the foundation of the Constitution of India. Education policies like the National Policy on Education (1986) gave much attention to the removal of gender disparity in access and achievement of education. At the grass root level education was also brought in order to empower women through the introduction of similar schemes such as Mahila Samakhya. Even though such state-centered efforts, as interpreted by Singh (2020) monumentally were destined to be implemented, it was regularly only partially frozen by bureaucratic wastefulness and the ongoing societal resistance. The cultural values which were deeply rooted in the culture, use of child marriage and a particular approach to the female education continued to be a significant barrier. However, these problems have been overcome due to the developments that had been achieved during the modern era, and the literacy rate of women rose by impressive percentages, and the number of 8.86 in 1951 was replaced by over 65 percent by the turn of the century. This was quite a slow intellectual floor, yet a most urgent prerequisite of the women getting into the formal work force. As Sharma and Iyer (2025) note, it was at this period that the production of educated women slowly began to venture into the sphere of men dominating professions; i.e., teaching, nursing and government services, disaggregating the gender roles and creating new role models to the society.

## **2. The Economic Liberalization Era and its Impact on Women's Employment**

The changes in the economy that had been brought with the year 1991 was a turning point in the Indian economy and had far reaching impacts to the employment of women. Liberalization of an economy that was once under state ownership to a market economy led to the rapid growth of the private economy particularly of the service and export based sectors. The outcome of this was the necessity of employing individuals to fill these new labour spots and the educated women constituted a large group of individuals who could fill these spots. Emerging Information Technology (IT) industry and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry, in particular, happened to be among the most important employers of young and urban and educated women. These were the jobs that gave them not only economic independence but also a certain degree of social mobility and exposure to the world work culture, which was a game changer to a number of them (Kumari, 2023).

However, the effect of liberalization was not as positive. It not only created opportunities but it enhanced inequalities that were there. Women were also limited to the menial jobs within the service industry that were characterized by poor working hours, stress, and low advancement in the career. Unequal pay was being practiced between men and women in areas. To an even greater extent, this economic boom, as Kumari (2023) explores extensively on an interstate, intersectoral level, just urbanized more and educated women, and left behind a vast number of rural and less-educated women in precarious, low-waged, and informal employment. The working mothers were still left with the task of being a professional and homemaker who had to continue with her usual domestic and care giving services without adequate support systems like child care centers or her work schedules. Singh (2020) also thinks that despite the increasing contribution of women to the economy, they remained disempowered as they did not have control over their circumstances at home or even at the workplace. Liberalization period was therefore a contradiction of its own because it empowered a visible population of urban professional women and at the same time empowered the weakness of people in the informal world.

### **3. The Digital Revolution and ICT as a Tool for Empowerment**

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been seen to grow at a high rate in the 21 st century that has fundamentally changed the opportunity frontier of Indian women. The project Digital India was launched in 2015 to transform the nation into a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy; during the project, one of the key elements was the digital literacy. In female case, ICTs have turned out to be a major tool to shatter the past limitations in terms of mobility, safety and information access (Manoj et al., 2023). Women are able to gain new skills and qualifications in the comfort of their home on the digital platforms both in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as well as e-learning resources, and at a low cost, which is usually free. It is particularly significant to the probable individuals who have dropped out of the formal education system due to marriage or family related reasons.

Digitization has brought forth new possibilities as far as employment is concerned. The introduction of the gig economy and online platforms of freelancing feminists has provided women with an opportunity to work in a flexible setting that can be adjusted according to their house duties (Bhatia,

2024). The e-commerce platforms provide the female entrepreneurs a chance to bypass the middle men in the market especially in rural areas where they can sell their products directly to a national and even international market. Dhanamalar (2020) underlines that female empowerment, which is one of the crucial aspects of empowerment, has been provided by mobile banking and government programs through digital and financial literacy. Moreover, social media has provided women with a powerful networking and advocacy instrument besides awareness creation on gender based issues. Karan and Mathur (2022) in their study of women empowerment with the use of ICT found out that not only does ICT access enhance opportunities of success in the economy, but it also enhances self-confidence and social interaction. The digital empowerment, however, will be determined by the gap of digital gender divide bridged or not. Iyer (2017) still states that even in rural India, there are still strong disparities between mobile phone-ownership and internet access between men and women due to such reasons as affordability, illiteracy, and the various restrictions imposed on them by the society (Iyer, 2017). (RASHTRAKAVI MAITHILI SHARAN GUPT)

#### **4. Contemporary Challenges and Future Trajectories in the AI-driven World**

The women opportunities and challenges have shifted as India goes into the digital era. The ICTs have presented numerous threats as they have been transformative. Most of the cybercrimes committed against women, including online harassment, trolling, non-consent sharing of intimate images, among others, have been caused by the anonymity of the internet, which has lead to an unfavorable online environment that may put women away (Choudhary and Patidar, 2024). The digital gender gap remains a very intense impediment and a significant segment of the female populace is still to reap the advantages of the digital economy. This disparity is not only on access of gadgets but also on wisdom of utilizing digital world efficiently and securely.

The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation in the future is a challenge and an opportunity. It is fair to say that automation would not favor women as the majority of the woman jobs in such sectors as the BPO and the data entry are susceptible to automation. This highlights the urgency of the upskilling and reskilling initiatives that will prepare women with future-oriented roles that will require higher skills of cognitive skills, innovativeness and technological know-how. In the meantime, there is an enormous possibility of AI enhancing economic inclusion of women. Saivasan

(2024) mentions that AI may be utilized to create more inclusive hiring by minimizing unconscious bias, offer personalized education and skills training to groups of people, or develop technological approaches to the health and safety of women. Bhatia (2024) emphasizes the significance of online platform in providing employment, as well as, community-building and support networks that play a huge role in the empowerment of women in general. The digital world will have an impact on the future development of Indian women based on how the society will succeed in combating these threats. It requires a multi-pronged strategy, which will combine investment in online infrastructures and literacy, effective legal frameworks to make the world online safe as well as proactive strategy to give women skills that would help them to survive in the world controlled by AI (Sharma and Iyer, 2025).

## **Conclusion**

The struggle of Indian women across the obstacles of the pre-modern world to the prospects of the digital world is the testimony of the eternal soul and dynamical impact of education and economic independence. The contemporary era, where the constitution has guaranteed and government sponsored programs has succeeded in doing this by to a large extent improving the literacy levels of women and the home no longer serves as the sole domain of women. This was what economic liberalization of the 1990s was founded on that resulted in a new breed of professional woman and her representation in the formal labour force became more visible, albeit with their benefits largely concentrated in the cities.

The digital revolution today is the most radical and disruptive phase in the history of this evolution. The ICTs have served as a force multiplier that has created the channels of education, work, and entrepreneurship that could never have existed previously. The online media has offered the freedom, liberalized access to information and markets and gave the women a powerful voice in the social sphere. Digital India movement and the development of mobile technology have contributed to an even greater expansion of this shift and now the promise of empowerment is closer to a reality of many.

However, this perfect tale is stained with ongoing issues and evolving issues. The most delicate dilemma is the digital gender gap, which will create a threat of the new hierarchy of exclusion, where women who neither use nor comprehend technology will be excluded. It is a significant problem that must be tackled both in the short and the long term since it poses the threat of cyber bullying and the future loss of workplaces due to robotization driven by AI. It is undeniable that this development is not only indisputable but also unsatisfactory.

Lastly, the story of the Indian woman in the digital age is a story to be read. The women empowerment process based on technology utilization requires a coherent drive to be able to realize the full potential. These not only imply access to technological means but also a digital literacy ecosystem, safety online as a result of good legal frameworks and a prudent allocation of up-skilling programs that would suit the needs of the new economy. This must be directed at pursuing more than access and availability to technology and even to the attainment of actual digital inclusion where all women have the potential and access to the digital tools to participate in her own destiny. The digital age to the modern age has offered new horizons, and the dilemma is now how to ensure that all the Indian women are able and free to bridge the gaps.

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