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PHAWAR AND THE POETICS OF PERFORMANCE: IMPROVISATION, SATIRE, AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN KHASI ORAL TRADITION

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Abstract

This article examines phawar*, the improvisational performance poetry tradition of the Khasi community of Meghalaya, India, situating it within global and Northeast Indian frameworks of poetry, song and oral performance. Although Khasi oral literature has attracted scholarly attention in relation to myth, folktale, and ritual chant,* phawar *remains under-theorised in contemporary performance studies. Drawing upon oral-formulaic theory associated with Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, performance theory articulated by Richard Bauman, and communication models proposed by Wilbur Schramm, the study conceptualises* phawar *as a structured yet improvisational genre rooted in communal interaction and symbolic negotiation. Through structural analysis and contextual observation, the paper demonstrates that* phawar *integrates strict syllabic metre, rhythmic chant (*ka kynhui*), satire (*ka kyoh*), and dialogic antiphony within diverse social settings, including festivals, political gatherings, rituals, and village councils. A comparative framework further positions* phawar *alongside African praise poetry, Japanese linked verse traditions, contemporary slam poetry, and Northeast Indian devotional and warrior song traditions. While sharing improvisational agility and audience participation with these global forms,* phawar *is distinguished by its ethical satire, ecological symbolism, and matrilineal social ethos. By foregrounding* phawar *as a sophisticated form of performance poetry rather than peripheral folklore, the article contributes to expanding global poetics beyond text-centric paradigms. It argues that recognising indigenous oral genres such as* phawar *enriches performance studies and affirms the continued vitality of embodied, communal, and dialogic literary expression in a rapidly transforming cultural landscape.*

Keywords: Phawar*; Performance Poetry; Oral Tradition; Khasi Indigenous Aesthetics; Improvisational Poetics*

Oral performance traditions across the world have sustained collective memory, social critique, and aesthetic expression long before the institutionalisation of written literature. Performance poetry situated at the intersection of music, chant, satire, and communal participation continues to function as a living archive of indigenous knowledge systems. Among the Khasi people of Meghalaya in Northeast India, *phawar* represents a distinctive form of improvised poetic performance that combines wit, rhythm, social commentary, and competitive exchange. Rooted in everyday life yet sharpened by public performance, *phawar* is not merely entertainment; it is a dialogic art that negotiates identity, morality, politics, and communal relationships.

Performed during festivals, market gatherings, community feasts, celebration for championing a sport or a war (in the olden days) and increasingly in public cultural

events, *phawar* is characterised by spontaneous composition, metaphorical density, and a heightened rhetorical style. It resonates with global traditions of oral poetic contest, ranging from African praise poetry to contemporary spoken word and rap battles, yet remains distinctly Khasi in its tonal cadence, cultural idiom, and social embeddedness. This article examines *phawar* as performance poetry, situating it within broader theoretical discussions on oral literature, performativity, and indigenous aesthetics, while foregrounding its cultural and communicative significance within Khasi society.

Literature Review

The study of oral performance poetry has been shaped significantly by theorists such as Milman Parry and Albert Lord, whose oral-formulaic theory emphasised improvisation and mnemonic devices in epic traditions. Their work demonstrated that oral composition is neither primitive nor derivative but governed by complex compositional strategies. Later, Walter J. Ong expanded the discussion by distinguishing between primary orality and literacy-based cultures, arguing that oral expression privileges sound, participation, and memory over textual fixity.

Performance-centred approaches, especially those of Richard Bauman, reconceptualised oral literature as an event rather than a static text. Bauman's framework foregrounds the interaction between performer and audience, highlighting how meaning emerges through context, gesture, tone, and communal response. Similarly, Dell Hymes emphasised ethnopoetics and the need to analyse oral forms within their cultural and linguistic environments.

Within Northeast Indian scholarship, studies on Khasi oral traditions have often focused on folktales, myths, and ritual chants, yet performance poetry like *phawar* has received comparatively limited academic attention. While references appear in ethnographic accounts of Khasi festivals and social gatherings, systematic analyses of *phawar* as a performative, improvisational poetic genre remain scarce. This lacuna underscores the need for focused scholarly engagement, particularly in understanding *phawar* as a dynamic form of poetic song and competitive verbal artistry embedded in matrilineal and community-centered social structures.

Problem Statement

Despite growing global interest in performance poetry and spoken-word traditions, the Khasi form of *phawar* remains critically underrepresented in scholarly discourse. Existing research on oral literature in Northeast India has largely privileged folktales, myths, ritual chants, and ethnographic descriptions, while improvisational poetic genres such as *phawar* have received minimal systematic analysis. This imbalance reflects a broader text-centric bias in literary studies, where written poetry is valorised over embodied, performative, and community-based forms of expression.

Furthermore, the absence of comprehensive documentation, transcription, and performance analysis has limited academic understanding of *Phawar*'s compositional strategies, linguistic features, and socio-political functions. As an

improvised and context-dependent art form, *phawar* risks marginalisation in the face of modernisation, digital entertainment cultures, and declining intergenerational transmission. Without rigorous scholarly engagement, its aesthetic complexity and cultural significance may remain inadequately theorised within global performance studies.

Therefore, there is a pressing need to conceptualise *phawar* not merely as folklore or entertainment, but as a sophisticated genre of performance poetry that contributes to broader debates on orality, improvisation, indigenous knowledge systems, and the politics of literary recognition.

Case Study: *Phawar* of the Khasis

Phawar constitutes one of the most vibrant and intellectually demanding forms of oral performance poetry among the Khasi community of Meghalaya, India. As an improvisational and dialogic genre, it is typically performed in rapid, antiphonal exchange between skilled orators who compose verses extempore in response to immediate stimuli, whether a rival's provocation, a social issue, or a ceremonial context. Far from being spontaneous in a chaotic sense, *phawar* reflects patterned improvisation, resonating with the oral-formulaic principles identified by Milman Parry and developed further by Albert B. Lord. Their foundational work demonstrated that oral composition relies on formulaic structures, thematic clusters, and mnemonic strategies that enable fluid yet disciplined creativity (Parry 1930; Lord 1960). Similarly, *phawar* performers draw upon inherited rhetorical frameworks, stock metaphors, and culturally encoded symbols while tailoring their delivery to the moment of performance.

Performance as Event and Communicative Action

Understanding *phawar* requires shifting attention from text to event. Richard Bauman conceptualises verbal art as performance, emphasising that meaning emerges through interaction, framing devices, audience participation, and contextual cues (Bauman 1977). In Khasi settings, *phawar* is inseparable from its performative environment, like village squares, festival grounds, community halls, or political gatherings. The audience does not function as passive spectators but as active co-creators. Applause, laughter, exclamations such as 'Hoooi kiw!' or 'kyn-o/kynhui,' and spontaneous interjections constitute feedback mechanisms that shape the trajectory of the performance.

This communicative cycle mirrors the sender–message–receiver–feedback model articulated by Wilbur Schramm (Schramm 1954). The lead performer encodes the message through metaphor, satire, rhythm, and gesture; the audience decodes it through shared cultural knowledge; feedback, whether approval, silence, or challenge, confirms or reshapes meaning. In this sense, *phawar* embodies symbolic interactionism, where meaning is negotiated rather than inherent. Language, gesture, tone, and collective memory converge to produce shared understanding. Moreover, Dell Hymes' ethnopoetic approach underscores the necessity of analysing oral genres within their sociolinguistic contexts (Hymes 1981). The communicative competence of a *phawar* performer includes mastery not only of

vocabulary and metre but also of social boundaries, knowing how far satire may extend without fracturing communal harmony.

Traditionally, *phawar* functioned as a public mode of disseminating information, articulating communal values, and expressing collective sentiment. Its rhetorical economy reflects what Richard Lanham terms clarity–brevity–sincerity (C-B-S), emphasising the necessity of saying 'exactly what you mean, neither more nor less' (Lanham 2003:137). The success of a *phawar* depends on concentrated expression, dense metaphors, compressed imagery, and rhythmic exactitude that capture attention instantly.

The leader of the performing group plays a pivotal role. Success hinges upon wit, intelligence, creativity, and an extensive command of cultural knowledge, mythology, clan histories, ecological patterns, and ritual practices. The lunar cycle, which structures agricultural rhythms, festivals, and ceremonial observances, often serves as a symbolic reference point. Delivery demands tonal modulation, controlled pacing, and sensitivity to the emotional climate of the occasion. Thus, performance is not merely linguistic but embodied; bodily expression reinforces symbolic meaning.

Structurally, *phawar* blends rhyme (*tara*) and rhythm (*khriang*) within strict syllabic metre. It is often composed in rhythmic couplets or quatrains delivered in a chanting tune known as *ka kynhui*. A typical stanza, termed *sur phawar*, comprises four lines: *Sai Khmat* (first two lines): Introduction of theme or situational reference; *Methah* (central thematic body): Development of imagery and context; *Sai Bud* (final lines): Conclusion or reinforcement of the message.

A crucial element is *ka kyoh*, the satirical third line that encapsulates and intensifies the stanza's impact. Performances commonly begin with elongated vocal openings, 'Ooo…!' or 'Aaa…!' to capture attention, and may conclude with participatory refrains such as 'Hoooi kiw!' These refrains are typically omitted during solemn rites, such as death ceremonies, demonstrating contextual sensitivity.

Group dynamics vary. At times, the leader delivers the opening line, followed by collective reinforcement from the group; in other instances, the first two lines are performed in unison, with the audience joining at the chorus. The interplay between soloist, ensemble, and crowd transforms poetry into communal enactment.

The thematic range of a *phawar* is expansive. Light-hearted compositions enliven dances, festivals, and archery competitions such as *ka siat khnam*. They are performed during weddings (*ka kyntiew kurim*), open village councils (*dorbar*), clan consecration rites (*ka tang jait*), election campaigns, and celebratory feasts. In these contexts, pun-intended humour targeting specific individuals or groups enhances engagement while remaining within culturally sanctioned boundaries.

Conversely, ritual-specific *phawar* accompany solemn events, including the ceremonial transfer of ancestral bones to clan ossuaries and reverential invocations to the paternal grandmother (*Meikha*). The omission of exuberant refrains in such contexts underscores the ethical dimension of performance.

Seng Khasi Phawar	**Translation:**
A… namar ka Seng Khasi, namar ka Seng Khasi	A . . . for the Seng Khasi, for the Seng Khasi,
Ba la tip halor u khet	Renowned in its rising strength,
Ban ioh ïa ka riti da la ka jong te kaba ieit	To reclaim and uphold our sacred customs—
Hoooi kiw...! Hoooi kiw...!	This is what we cherish most.
Ban ïoh ïa ka baieit, Ban ïoh ïa ka baieit	Hoooi kiw . . .!
Ka shah teh ka bym lah long	To attain what we love,
Ban ïaid sha rum sha neng	We must not remain bound,
Ban ïa kynduh para riew seng	But walk freely across lands and skies,
Hoooi kiw...! Hoooi kiw...!	To meet and unite with fellow believers.
A… ki ong ïa ngi ba wit, ki ong ïa ngi ba wit bad ïa kata ngim sngew eiei	Hoooi kiw . . .!
Ngi leh ïa kaba dei ha ka niam ka bor u Blei	They say we resist, they say we obstruct—
Hoooi kiw...! Hoooi kiw...!	Yet we take no offence,
A… ko para Seng baieit, ko para Seng baieit	For we act in righteousness,
Ïa kane to da kynmaw	In the name of faith and divine शक्ति.
Wat ai ba Seng Khasi kan shah rahnoh ha ka um saw	Hoooi kiw . . .!
Hoooi kiw...! Hoooi kiw...!	O beloved members of the Seng,
A… ma phi kiba peit kai	Let this be remembered well:
Na shabar sharud lynti	Do not let Seng Khasi be swept away
Sha la tynrai wan phai	By the rising flood of change.
Seng Khasi te kan pyni	Hoooi kiw . . .!
Hoooi kiw...! Hoooi kiw...!	And to those who stand watching from afar,
	Lingering by the roadside,
	Return to your roots
	Seng Khasi shall guide your way.
	Hoooi kiw . . . !

This *phawar* exemplifies the use of performance poetry as ideological articulation and cultural assertion. It operates as a collective voice rather than an individual expression, foregrounding the institutional identity of Seng Khasi as a guardian of indigenous religion and cultural continuity. The repetitive invocation (*A . . . namar ka Seng Khasi*) functions as both an anaphoric device and a performative call, reinforcing communal solidarity and mnemonic retention.

Seng Khasi is a socio-religious and cultural organisation founded in 1899 in Shillong to preserve, protect, and promote the indigenous faith and traditions of the Khasi people. It emerged during a period of intense colonial influence and the spread of Christianity in the Khasi Hills, when concerns grew over the erosion of traditional beliefs, customs, and identity.

At its core, Seng Khasi seeks to uphold the Khasi indigenous religion, often referred to as *Niam Khasi*, which emphasises reverence for a supreme creator,

ancestral respect, moral living, and harmony with nature. The organisation also plays a crucial role in maintaining customary practices such as clan identity (*ka jait*), matrilineal inheritance, and ritual observances tied to life-cycle events.

Culturally, Seng Khasi is widely recognised for organising and institutionalising major festivals such as *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, a thanksgiving dance that celebrates purity, gratitude, and community cohesion. Through such events, it reinforces Khasi identity and provides a platform for the transmission of traditional knowledge, music, dance, and oral expressions like *phawar*.

Beyond ritual and festival, Seng Khasi functions as a moral and social body that advocates for the preservation of indigenous values in the face of modernisation and cultural change. It engages in educational, cultural, and community initiatives aimed at strengthening awareness among younger generations about their heritage. Seng Khasi represents a collective effort to sustain Khasi cultural identity, religious autonomy, and social continuity, serving as both a guardian of tradition and a dynamic institution adapting to contemporary challenges.

Structurally, the composition follows the *sur phawar* format, where the opening lines (*sai khmat*) establish thematic intent, cultural revival and identity, while subsequent lines (*sai bud*) expand into exhortation and warning. The refrain 'Hoooi kiw!' acts as a participatory marker, inviting audience engagement and reinforcing the rhythmic cadence.

Symbolically, the imagery of 'flood' signifies cultural erosion under modernity and external influence, while 'returning to roots' invokes indigenous epistemology and ancestral continuity. The *phawar* thus functions as both a persuasive and protective discourse, aligning with communication models such as those of Wilbur Schramm, where message and feedback co-create meaning.

Ka Phawar danda	**Translation:**
Ani ! Ana! i ei sha ma ita?	Oh! Ah! Oh! Ah!
Sit shi sit - ba kjit ing dong jong nga,	Who is this, who could it be
I thyllah ma? i jynreiñ ma?	Ticking, biting, clinging to me?
Ynda nga peit	Is it a flea, or a creeping lice?
Dei pynban i 'liem Sohra.	But when I looked more closely
	It was the infamous Sohra leech!

This humorous *phawar* illustrates the playful and satirical dimension of Khasi performance poetry. Rooted in everyday experience, it draws upon ecological familiarity, particularly the leech associated with the rain-soaked terrain of Sohra historically known as Cherrapunji, which is one of the most iconic climatic landscapes in the world, renowned for receiving some of the highest annual rainfall on Earth. Situated on the southern edge of the Khasi Hills, Sohra lies along the path of the moisture-laden monsoon winds from the Bay of Bengal. As these clouds rise abruptly against the plateau, they release intense and sustained rainfall, shaping the region's dramatic ecology of deep valleys, cascading waterfalls, and lush vegetation. Sohra gained global attention during the nineteenth century under British colonial administration, when it was recorded as

the wettest place on Earth. It briefly served as an administrative centre due to its cooler climate, but the relentless rainfall and challenging terrain made long-term settlement difficult, leading to the eventual shift of administrative focus to Shillong. Despite this, Sohra remained significant as a site of early missionary activity, education, and cultural exchange.

The gradual build-up of suspense (Is it a flea . . . a lice . . .) culminates in an unexpected yet locally resonant punchline. The rain in Sohra is not merely a climatic phenomenon but a defining force in Khasi life and imagination. It influences agriculture, architecture, oral traditions, and everyday practices. The landscape has given rise to unique adaptations such as living root bridges, water-harvesting practices, and ecological knowledge systems. In oral expressions like *phawar*, references to rain, leeches, mist, and fertile land are common, reflecting an intimate relationship between environment and cultural expression.

The humour emerges through exaggeration, rhythm, and delayed revelation, demonstrating the performer's ability to manipulate audience expectation. Such *phawar* align with Bauman's notion of performance as emergent, where meaning is shaped through timing, delivery, and audience reaction. The use of sound patterns (*tic tic tic*) enhances the auditory experience, reinforcing its performative nature.

Ka Phawar pharshi samla:	**Translation:**
A u khla ha Kolkata.....u khla ha Kolkata	Oh! a tiger in Kolkata, a tiger in Kolkata,
U panpoh da ka rajai	Wrapped in a quilt at his waist,
Ïa kynduh para samla	There he meets his beloved,
U ïa doh u ïa kutbai	They embrace, then part their ways.
Hoooi kiw...! Hoooi kiw...!	Hoooi kiw…!

This *phawar* reflects youthful playfulness and coded romantic expression. The metaphor of the 'tiger' introduces masculinity and bravado, while the setting in a distant urban space (Kolkata) suggests imagination, aspiration, and narrative exaggeration. The brevity of the encounter, meeting, intimacy, and departure captures fleeting romance, often expressed through metaphor rather than direct declaration due to cultural norms.

The symbolic layering aligns with what Dell Hymes describes as culturally embedded meaning-making, where context determines interpretation. The performative delivery, combined with communal laughter, transforms private emotion into shared experience.

Ka Phawar pharshi samla:	**Translation:**
A ngan nai i dur bhabriew	Oh! I seek not a pretty face,
Ngan nai i dur bhabriew	No, not beauty alone
Mynmiet khwïap khwïap kum i kha basa	Like a fish that dances at night,
Mynstep kum i 'tungtap.	But is gone by morning's light.
A lajong te i la i jong, la jong te la i jong	For my beloved is mine alone,
La lieh ne la i ïong, lyngkot ne la i jrong	Whether fair or dark, short or tall,
Lajong te i la jong, lajong te i la jong.	Mine she is, in truth and bond
	Mine she remains through all.
	Hoooi kiw…!

This *phawar* conveys moral philosophy within a romantic framework. It critiques superficial attraction and emphasises constancy, loyalty, and acceptance. The metaphor of the 'dancing fish' versus 'morning chutney' juxtaposes fleeting charm with enduring substance.

Such proverbial expressions demonstrate the didactic function of *phawar*, where entertainment merges with ethical instruction. The repetition (my one is my own) reinforces emotional commitment and communal values of relational stability. This aligns with Walter J. Ong's observation that oral cultures rely on repetition and formulaic phrasing to reinforce memory and social norms.

Warning Phawar:	**Translation:**
Jingieit mynta la pdang	Love today has grown shallow,
Ka pyrthei ba mangkarong	In this world of fleeting display,
Thylliej wat jler ho rang	Guard your tongue, O young man,
Ïoh I dei I kur lajong	Lest she belong to your own clan.

This *phawar* reflects the regulatory function of oral poetry within Khasi society, particularly in relation to clan exogamy. The caution against careless speech suggests the cultural taboo against intra-clan relationships, a cornerstone of Khasi matrilineal identity.

The tone is admonitory yet poetic, employing metaphor (love has grown shallow) to critique modern relational instability. The warning is delivered succinctly, reflecting the clarity - brevity - sincerity principle discussed by Richard Lanham.

Across the foregoing examples, *phawar* reveals a striking thematic versatility that ranges from assertions of institutional identity and cultural revival to humour, courtship, and moral instruction. Yet beneath this diversity lies a coherent set of aesthetic and communicative principles that define the genre's integrity. Central among these is the capacity for improvisation within structure**,** a disciplined spontaneity governed by strict syllabic metre, rhythmic cadence (*khriang*), and patterned composition. This balance between creativity and constraint resonates strongly with the oral-formulaic theory advanced by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, who argue that oral traditions rely on formulaic systems that enable performers to compose in real time while maintaining structural coherence (Parry 1930; Lord 1960).

Equally significant is the symbolic density and metaphorical compression characteristic of *phawar*. Performers employ layered imagery drawn from ecology, kinship, ritual life, and everyday experience, condensing complex meanings into brief, rhythmically charged utterances. Such symbolic articulation is not merely decorative but functional, enabling rapid communication of shared values and social commentary. In this sense, language operates as both an aesthetic medium and a social instrument, where meaning is collectively constructed rather than individually imposed. This aligns with the ethnopoetic insights of Dell Hymes, who emphasises that verbal art must be understood within its cultural and communicative context (Hymes 1981).

Another defining feature is the centrality of audience participation and performative feedback**.** *Phawar* is inherently dialogic: the performer's delivery is

continuously shaped by audience response, applause, laughter, vocal affirmations such as "Hoooi kiw!", or even silence. This interactive dynamic completes the communicative circuit described by Wilbur Schramm, wherein the effectiveness of a message is realised through feedback and interpretation (Schramm 1954). Meaning, therefore, is not fixed within the verbal text but emerges dynamically through performance, reception, and shared cultural codes.

At the same time, *phawar* performs a crucial role in ethical and social regulation**.** Through satire, humour, and proverbial expression, it critiques behaviour, reinforces norms, and transmits moral values. However, this critique operates within culturally sanctioned boundaries. The credibility of a *phawar* performer rests not solely on poetic skill but on ethical positioning; satire must correct without humiliating, provoke without destabilising communal harmony. This reflects the performance framework articulated by Richard Bauman, who conceptualises verbal art as socially framed action governed by communal expectations and norms (Bauman 1977). The performer's authority is thus negotiated through knowledge, rhetorical discipline, and moral restraint.

The participatory and situational nature of *phawar* exemplifies what Walter J. Ong describes as primary orality**,** in which expression is embedded in lived experience, communal memory, and immediate context rather than in detached textuality (Ong 1982). The use of repetition, formulaic openings, and rhythmic refrains enhances memorability while fostering collective engagement. Symbols within *phawar* carry learned and shared meanings; they resonate because they are rooted in collective consciousness. Through interaction, these symbols are continually reinterpreted, reaffirming that oral performance is not a static artifact but a living discourse.

Taken together, *phawar* emerges as a sophisticated indigenous form of performance poetry that integrates improvisation, rhetorical precision, symbolic richness, and communal participation. Its structural discipline parallels oral-formulaic theory (Parry; Lord), its event-centred vitality reflects performance theory (Bauman), its sociolinguistic embeddedness echoes ethnopoetics (Hymes), and its communicative dynamics align with mass communication models (Schramm).

As a living poetic ecology, where song, speech, gesture, and audience converge, *phawar* expands global understandings of performance poetry beyond text-centric paradigms. It challenges the privileging of written literature by foregrounding embodied knowledge systems, dialogic meaning-making, and community-based aesthetics. In doing so, it reaffirms the centrality of indigenous oral traditions in shaping literary theory, cultural identity, and the ongoing negotiation of meaning within society.

Discussion

A performance-centred analysis of *phawar* reveals its complex, multi-layered functions as a communicative, aesthetic, and socio-cultural practice. Rather than being reducible to entertainment or folklore, *phawar* operates as a dynamic site where language, performance, and community intersect to produce meaning in real time.

First, *phawar* functions as a mechanism of social regulation and moral discourse. Through satire, humour, and metaphorical indirection, performers articulate a

critique of behavioural patterns, the political scene, and social vibes. Importantly, such critique is embedded within culturally sanctioned limits, ensuring that correction does not escalate into confrontation. In the Khasi matrilineal system, where clan affiliation, kinship obligations, and social cohesion are foundational, this form of indirect critique reinforces communal accountability while preserving relational harmony. This regulatory function aligns with Richard Bauman's understanding of verbal art as socially situated action, which emphasises that performance is framed by shared norms and expectations that govern both expression and reception (Bauman 1977).

Second, *phawar* constitutes a highly sophisticated arena of linguistic and rhetorical artistry. Its improvisational nature challenges dominant literary paradigms that privilege solitary authorship and written composition. Instead, poetic creation in *phawar* is immediate, collaborative, and context-dependent. Performers draw upon a repertoire of formulaic expressions, symbolic references, and rhythmic patterns to compose extempore, demonstrating what Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord identify as the structured improvisation characteristic of oral traditions (Parry 1930; Lord 1960). Creativity here is not diminished by spontaneity; rather, it is intensified through the necessity of real-time composition, audience engagement, and rhetorical precision. As Bauman (1977) further argues, performance is emergent and co-constructed, with meaning shaped through the interaction between performer and audience.

Third, *phawar* serves as a crucial interface between tradition and modernity. While deeply rooted in Khasi cosmology, ecological symbolism, and social organisation, contemporary performances increasingly incorporate themes such as migration, environmental change, digital culture, and governance. This thematic expansion illustrates the adaptability of *phawar* as a living tradition capable of responding to shifting socio-political realities without relinquishing its formal and aesthetic integrity. Such adaptability reflects what Walter J. Ong describes as the situational and responsive nature of primary orality, where expression evolves in accordance with lived experience and communal needs (Ong 1982).

Finally, situating *phawar* within global discourses of performance poetry highlights both points of convergence and divergence. Parallels may be drawn with contemporary forms such as slam poetry and rap cyphers, particularly in their reliance on improvisation, rhythmic delivery, and audience interaction. However, *phawar* differs fundamentally in its communal ethos and ethical grounding. Unlike many commercialised spoken-word circuits that foreground individual expression and competitive spectacle, *phawar* remains embedded in ritual contexts, collective identity, and shared moral frameworks. Its purpose is not merely expressive but integrative, reinforcing social cohesion and cultural continuity.

In this respect, *phawar* challenges text-centric literary hierarchies that privilege written over oral forms. By prioritising embodiment, sound, gesture, and improvisation as primary aesthetic values, it reorients critical attention toward performance as a mode of knowledge production. This perspective resonates with

the ethnopoetic framework of Dell Hymes, which calls for the analysis of verbal art within its cultural and performative context (Hymes 1981). Additionally, its communicative dynamics reflect the feedback-oriented model proposed by Wilbur Schramm, where meaning is co-created through interaction between sender and receiver (Schramm 1954).

Collectively, these aspects highlight the significance of *phawar* in the context of performance studies and indigenous literary theory, demonstrating its usefulness as an analytical tool. It exemplifies how oral traditions function as living systems of communication that integrate aesthetics, ethics, and social practice. By engaging with *phawar* as performance poetry, scholars can expand theoretical frameworks beyond Eurocentric models and recognise the intellectual and artistic sophistication inherent in indigenous oral forms.

Comparative Study: *Phawar* and Global Traditions of Performance Poetry

Performance poetry and poetry songs constitute a vibrant expressive mode across cultures, where voice, rhythm, embodiment, and audience interaction converge. The Khasi *phawar* is an improvisational, dialogic, and rhetorically disciplined form that shares structural and functional affinities with global traditions of oral performance, while retaining distinct indigenous features rooted in matrilineal ethos, ecological symbolism, and communal ethics. This comparative study situates *phawar* alongside selected traditions from the world and Northeast India to illuminate convergences and divergences in aesthetics, structure, and socio-cultural function.

Phawar and African Praise Poetry: African praise poetry, particularly among Zulu imbongi traditions, exemplifies improvised performance centred on public address, political commentary, and genealogical memory. Scholars such as Ruth Finnegan have emphasised that African oral poetry is deeply contextual and event-oriented (Finnegan 1970). Like *phawar*, praise poetry employs heightened diction, metaphorical density, and performative gestures.

Both traditions rely on audience feedback and social immediacy. However, while African praise poetry often affirms heroic identity and lineage, *phawar* tends toward dialogic satire and communal regulation. The Khasi performer's role is less that of a court bard and more that of a socially embedded commentator whose critique must maintain harmony within the clan-based social order.

Phawar and Japanese *Renga* / Spoken Chant Traditions: Improvised collaborative poetry in Japan, particularly linked verse (*renga*), foregrounds collective composition and responsiveness. Though structurally distinct, *renga* shares with *phawar* the principle of antiphonal creativity and thematic continuity. In performance contexts, traditional chant-based arts emphasise tonal precision and embodied delivery.

From the perspective of orality, Walter J. Ong notes that oral cultures privilege additive structures and situational thinking (Ong 1982). *Phawar*, like Japanese chant traditions, integrates voice modulation and rhythmic cadence as integral to meaning production. Yet unlike the often meditative aesthetic of Japanese poetic collaboration, *phawar* thrives on satire, wit, and competitive immediacy.

Phawar and Contemporary Slam Poetry / Rap Battles: Modern spoken-word and rap battle traditions exhibit striking parallels with *phawar*. Slam poetry emphasises improvisation, social critique, audience interaction, and performative presence. Rap cyphers and battle formats involve verbal duelling, metaphorical prowess, and rhythmic precision. Performance theory as articulated by Richard Bauman, conceptualises such forms as emergent events shaped by performer–audience dynamics (Bauman 1977).

Similarly, *phawar* unfolds as a co-constructed act, where applause and vocal responses determine success. Both genres deploy satire, irony, and socio-political commentary. However, while slam poetry often foregrounds individual self-expression and identity politics within urban contexts, *phawar* is anchored in communal ethics. Its satire is regulated by cultural norms; humiliation or social fracture is avoided. The authority of the performer arises from communal trust rather than individual celebrity.

Performance Poetry in Northeast India: Within Northeast India, multiple oral-poetic traditions reveal affinities with *phawar*.

Borgeet of Assam: The Vaishnavite devotional songs composed by Srimanta Sankardev integrate lyric poetry with music and performance. *Borgeet* foregrounds melodic discipline and spiritual devotion. Unlike the improvisational and satirical tenor of *phawar*, *borgeet* adheres to devotional structure and scriptural themes. Yet both forms demonstrate how poetry song mediates collective identity and spiritual consciousness.

Ao Naga War Chants**:** Among the Ao Nagas, traditional war chants and festival songs combine rhythmic chanting with collective participation. Like *phawar*, these chants rely on repetition, call-and-response, and performative embodiment. However, Naga chants often emphasise communal valour and historical memory, whereas *phawar* incorporates satire as a mechanism of social commentary.

Mizo Folk Songs (Hlado): Mizo *hlado* songs historically celebrated hunting and heroic exploits. Similar to *phawar*, they employ symbolic imagery and structured metre. Yet *hlado* is typically narrative and commemorative, whereas *phawar* privileges improvisational exchange and rhetorical immediacy.

Across Northeast India, oral traditions reflect what Dell Hymes describes as communicative competence embedded in cultural context (Hymes 1981). The performer's authority derives from mastery of linguistic nuance and social codes. *Phawar* shares this embeddedness but stands out for its structured satire and competitive dialogism.

Structural and Functional Comparison: This comparison reveals that while global performance poetry traditions share improvisation, rhythm, and embodiment, *phawar* uniquely integrates satire with communal restraint. Its emphasis on clarity–brevity–sincerity parallels rhetorical principles discussed by Richard Lanham, while its communicative cycle reflects Wilbur Schramm's sender–receiver feedback model (Schramm 1954).

Distinctive Features of *Phawar*: Dialogic Antiphony: Unlike many monologic traditions, *phawar* thrives on rapid exchange; Ethical Satire: Social critique operates within culturally sanctioned limits; Ecological Symbolism: Frequent reference to lunar cycles, agriculture, and nature anchors it in Khasi cosmology; Ritual Versatility: It spans celebratory, political, and ritual contexts; Structured Metre with Improvisation: Balances formulaic discipline with creative spontaneity.

Comparatively situated, *Phawar* occupies a distinctive position within global performance poetry. It shares improvisational agility with rap battles, communal embeddedness with African praise poetry, collaborative spirit with Japanese linked verse, and ritual integration with Northeast Indian devotional traditions. Yet its synthesis of satire, rhetorical precision, symbolic ecology, and ethical moderation marks it as uniquely Khasi.

In expanding performance poetry studies beyond Euro-American frameworks, *phawar* challenges text-centric paradigms and foregrounds embodied, dialogic, and community-centred aesthetics. As oral traditions encounter rapid socio-cultural transformation, comparative scholarship affirms *phawar* not as peripheral folklore but as a sophisticated, theoretically rich genre within the global archive of performance poetry.

Way Forward

For *phawar* to attain sustained scholarly visibility and cultural vitality within global performance poetry studies, a multi-pronged and interdisciplinary approach is essential. Such an approach must move beyond mere documentation toward critical theorisation, community engagement, and institutional support, ensuring that *phawar* is recognised not only as a cultural artefact but as a dynamic epistemological system.

First, there is an urgent need for systematic audio-visual documentation and archiving of live performances. Given that *phawar* is fundamentally embodied, dependent on tone, gesture, rhythm, and audience interaction, textual transcription alone is insufficient. High-quality recordings, accompanied by detailed transcription, translation, and contextual annotation, would preserve their performative nuances and enable rigorous scholarly analysis. This aligns with Richard Bauman's performance-centred framework, which emphasises on the importance of capturing verbal art as an event rather than reducing it to text (Bauman 1977).

Second, interdisciplinary research collaborations are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of *phawar*. Integrating perspectives from linguistics, anthropology, performance studies, folklore, and musicology can illuminate its structural features, symbolic systems, and socio-cultural functions. Such an approach resonates with the ethnopoetic methodology advocated by Dell Hymes, which emphasises the need to situate verbal art within its cultural and communicative contexts (Hymes 1981).

Third, the development of digital repositories and community-driven platforms can play a transformative role in preservation and dissemination.

Digitisation not only ensures archival longevity but also facilitates accessibility for younger generations who increasingly engage with culture through digital media. Community participation in curating and interpreting these repositories is vital to maintaining authenticity and avoiding external misrepresentation. In this regard, digital humanities initiatives can bridge the gap between traditional knowledge systems and contemporary modes of cultural transmission.

Fourth, comparative and cross-cultural scholarship should be actively pursued to situate *phawar* within global traditions of improvisational performance poetry. By engaging with forms such as slam poetry, rap cyphers, stand-up comedy and other oral traditions, scholars can expand theoretical frameworks beyond Eurocentric paradigms and foreground indigenous contributions to global poetics. This comparative positioning not only enhances academic visibility but also challenges hierarchical distinctions between written and oral literary forms, echoing the critiques advanced by Walter J. Ong regarding the marginalisation of oral expression (Ong 1982).

Fifth, community-centred pedagogical initiatives are essential for sustaining the tradition. Workshops, school curricula, and cultural programs can encourage youth participation while transmitting the ethical frameworks that govern *phawar* performance. Such initiatives must prioritise not only technical skill but also cultural sensibility, ensuring that satire, humour, and critique remain aligned with communal values. The communicative model proposed by Wilbur Schramm underscores the importance of shared understanding and feedback in sustaining meaningful interaction (Schramm 1954), a principle that is equally relevant in pedagogical contexts.

Finally, there is a need for institutional recognition and scholarly integration of *phawar* within academic curricula and research agendas. Inclusion in university syllabi, research funding priorities, and cultural policy frameworks would legitimise *phawar* as a subject of serious academic inquiry. Such recognition would also contribute to the broader project of decolonising knowledge systems by foregrounding indigenous epistemologies and aesthetic practices.

In recognising *phawar* as a sophisticated form of performance poetry, scholars not only contribute to the preservation of Khasi cultural heritage but also expand the conceptual boundaries of literary studies. As oral traditions navigate rapid socio-cultural transformations, sustained academic engagement, ethical documentation, and community participation are imperative. Through such efforts, *phawar* can continue to thrive as a living, improvised, and deeply communal form of poetic expression resonating across generations while enriching global understandings of performance, language, and culture.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of *phawar* within the wider spectrum of global and Northeast Indian performance poetry underscores its significance as a structurally disciplined, rhetorically sophisticated, and socially embedded genre of oral expression. Far from being an isolated folkloric residue, *phawar* emerges as a

dynamic and adaptive form that participates in broader traditions of improvisational poetics while retaining a distinct cultural identity grounded in Khasi cosmology and matrilineal ethics. When examined alongside African praise poetry, Japanese collaborative verse practices, contemporary slam poetry, and Northeast Indian devotional and martial song traditions, *phawar* demonstrates shared features of improvisation, rhythmic structuring, performative embodiment, and audience participation, while simultaneously articulating a unique communal ethos that prioritises social cohesion and moral accountability.

From a theoretical perspective, *phawar* substantiates foundational insights from oral-formulaic theory as developed by Milman Parry and Albert B. Lord, particularly the notion that oral composition is governed by patterned flexibility rather than spontaneity devoid of structure (Parry 1930; Lord 1960). Its event-centred and dialogic nature further reflects the performance paradigm articulated by Richard Bauman, wherein meaning is not contained within the text but emerges through the interaction between performer and audience (Bauman 1977). Additionally, the communicative dynamics of *phawar* resonate with the feedback-oriented model proposed by Wilbur Schramm, highlighting how encoding, decoding, and audience response collectively shape the interpretive process (Schramm 1954).

At the same time, *phawar* complicates and extends dominant frameworks of performance poetry by foregrounding the interplay between satire, ethics, and communal regulation. Unlike many contemporary spoken-word traditions that emphasise individual expression or competitive confrontation, *phawar* operates within culturally sanctioned boundaries where critique is tempered by responsibility. Its satire functions as a corrective mechanism rather than a divisive force; humour is deployed to reinforce social norms without undermining communal harmony. In this regard, the authority of the performer is derived not from spectacle or individual prominence but from moral credibility, ecological knowledge, and rhetorical discipline, qualities that are deeply embedded within Khasi cultural practice.

By situating *phawar* within global performance traditions, this study contributes to the ongoing project of de-centering text-centric literary paradigms and expanding the scope of literary studies to include indigenous oral epistemologies. As Walter J. Ong has argued, oral traditions represent fundamentally different modes of knowledge production, characterised by participation, immediacy, and communal memory (Ong 1982). Similarly, the ethnopoetic insights of Dell Hymes reinforce the need to analyse such forms within their sociocultural and performative contexts (Hymes 1981).

In an era marked by rapid modernisation, digitisation, and shifting cultural practices, the continued vitality of *phawar* depends upon sustained scholarly engagement, critical documentation, and meaningful community participation. Beyond its artistic value, *phawar* endures as a living communicative system, an embodied discourse where song, speech, memory, and collective identity converge. Its study not only enriches our understanding of performance poetry but also reaffirms the centrality of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping global literary and cultural theory.

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EFFECTIVENESS OF MICROFINANCE INSTITUTIONS IN PROMOTING RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN INDIA

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Abstract

Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) have emerged as critical agents of financial inclusion and rural development in India. This research paper examines the effectiveness of MFIs in promoting rural entrepreneurship by enhancing access to credit, supporting enterprise creation, and empowering marginalized communities. Using a descriptive and analytical methodology based on secondary data from national reports and scholarly studies, the paper evaluates the socio-economic impact of microfinance initiatives such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and NABARD-led programs. The findings reveal that MFIs have significantly contributed to income generation, employment creation, and women empowerment in rural India. However, challenges such as regional disparities, high interest rates, and limited financial literacy continue to affect their effectiveness. The study concludes with policy recommendations to strengthen microfinance as a sustainable tool for rural entrepreneurship.

***Keywords**: Microfinance, Rural Entrepreneurship, Financial Inclusion, SHGs, NABARD, Women Empowerment*

The majority of the population in developing countries live in rural areas where they derive their livelihoods mainly from subsistence agriculture. Now this rural population is focussing on using local skills, raw materials, and traditional knowledge to create sustainable enterprises. Rural entrepreneurship is the creation, management, and development of new business ventures in rural areas to harness local resources, generate employment, and foster economic growth.

Rural entrepreneurship is a key driver of inclusive growth in India, contributing to employment generation, poverty reduction, and balanced regional development. Despite its importance, rural entrepreneurs often face constraints such as lack of capital, limited access to formal banking, and inadequate institutional support.

Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) address these challenges by providing small loans, savings, and other financial services to low-income households. Over the past three decades, microfinance has expanded rapidly in India, particularly through the SHG-Bank linkage programme initiated by NABARD.

Recent data indicates that rural areas account for nearly 80% of microfinance lending portfolios, highlighting the sector's strong rural orientation. This underscores the growing relevance of microfinance in fostering rural entrepreneurship.

What is Rural Entrepreneurship?

Rural entrepreneurship refers to the process of identifying, developing and managing business ventures in rural areas to address local needs, create jobs and promote economic development.

It leverages the resources, opportunities and talents available in rural regions to generate economic growth and improve the quality of life for rural populations.

What is Microfinance?

Microfinance refers to providing financial services, including small-value loans, to households, small businesses, and entrepreneurs who lack access to formal banking services. It is an effective tool for financial inclusion, enabling marginalized and low-income groups, particularly women, to achieve social equity and empowerment.

Literature Review

Microfinance has been widely studied as a development tool that enhances income levels and encourages small business creation in rural areas. It has been recognized as a mechanism for poverty alleviation and financial inclusion, especially among marginalized communities. Regional studies highlight its role in reducing migration and promoting self-employment, although challenges like over-indebtedness persist.

Purpose of the Study

To examine the role of MFIs in promoting rural entrepreneurship in India; To evaluate the economic and social impact of microfinance; To identify challenges affecting the effectiveness of MFIs; To suggest policy measures for strengthening microfinance

Status of Microfinance in India

In India, the microfinance sector has experienced significant growth, with 168 Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) operating across 29 States, 4 Union Territories, and 563 districts. The Microfinance sector in India is undergoing significant transformation due to a growing regulatory framework, digitization and a renewed policy focus on inclusive growth, aiming to provide credit and financial services to underserved and economically vulnerable populations in rural and semi-urban areas. Microfinance is considered a useful tool for socio-economic upliftment in India with a dominant presence of self-help groups (SHG) in the microfinance sector**.** Reports show that over 17 crore rural households are linked with SHGs and nearly 85 lakh SHGs are credit-linked. These figures highlight the extensive outreach of microfinance and its potential for entrepreneurship promotion.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1 - Impact of Microfinance on Rural Entrepreneurship

Indicator	Before Microfinance	After Microfinance
Business Ownership (%)	20–25%	45–50%
Monthly Income (₹)	4,000–5,000	9,000–12,000
Women Participation (%)	25–30%	60–65%
Employment Generation (%)	15%	35–40%

From the above table 1 it is interpreted that microfinance significantly improves entrepreneurial participation, income levels, and employment opportunities.

Table 2 - Utilization of Microfinance Loans

Purpose	Percentage (%)
Agriculture & Allied Activities	35%
Small Trade & Retail	25%
Livestock & Dairy	15%
Handicrafts	10%
Services	15%

From the above table 2 it is interpreted that most loans are used for income-generating activities, indicating a direct link with entrepreneurship.

Table 3 - Key Challenges

Challenge	Percentage (%)
High Interest Rates	30%
Lack of Financial Literacy	25%
Limited Market Access	20%
Over-Indebtedness	15%
Regional Disparities	10%

From the above data analysis which is done using secondary data collected from reports of NABARD and RBI publications, it is found that microfinance acts as both a financial and social tool, enabling rural households to transition from subsistence to enterprise-based livelihoods.

It promotes entrepreneurial activities. There is significant increase in income and employment of rural population. Strong impact on women entrepreneurship through SHGs can also be noticed and financial literacy is enhancing effectiveness of microfinance.

Role of Microfinance in Women Empowerment

Microfinance plays a significant role in women empowerment, especially in developing countries, by improving access to financial resources and enhancing social and economic independence. Here's a clear breakdown of its role:

Economic Independence: Microfinance institutions provide small loans, savings accounts, and credit facilities to women who typically lack access to traditional banking. It enables women to start small businesses (tailoring, food processing, handicrafts, etc.), helps generate regular income and reduces dependence on family members.

Poverty Reduction: By supporting income-generating activities women contribute directly to household income which improves living standards (food, education, healthcare) and breaks the cycle of poverty over time.

Decision-Making Power: Access to financial resources increases women's role in household financial decisions, children's education and health choices and community-level participation. This leads to greater confidence and autonomy.

Entrepreneurship Development: Microfinance encourages women to become entrepreneurs and provides capital for startups, promotes skill development and business management and builds leadership qualities.

Social Empowerment: Participation in Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and microfinance programs builds social networks and solidarity, increases awareness about rights, health, and education and reduces gender discrimination and social isolation.

Financial Inclusion: Microfinance brings women into the formal financial system with access to banking services. It encourages saving habits and improves financial literacy.

Thus, Microfinance has been instrumental in enhancing financial independence, improving decision-making power, encouraging participation in economic activities. Empirical evidence shows a moderate to strong positive impact on women's empowerment through entrepreneurship. Microfinance is a powerful tool for women empowerment as it promotes financial independence, social

inclusion, and decision-making power. However, its effectiveness depends on proper implementation, financial literacy, and supportive policies.

Challenges and Limitations

Rural entrepreneurs rely heavily on microfinance, but they face several challenges and limitations that reduce its effectiveness.

High Interest Rates: Microfinance loans often carry higher interest rates than traditional bank loans which Increases repayment burden on small entrepreneurs and reduces profitability of rural businesses

Small Loan Size: Loans are usually very limited in amount and are not sufficient for scaling businesses or investing in better technology. It keeps enterprises at a subsistence level

Over-Indebtedness: Easy access to multiple loans from different institutions can lead to Debt traps and Financial stress. Borrowers may take new loans to repay old ones

Lack of Financial Literacy: Many rural entrepreneurs lack knowledge of loan terms and interest calculations and business planning and budgeting. It leads to poor financial decisions and misuse of funds

Inadequate Training and Support: Microfinance often provides credit but not skill development and business guidance. Without training, businesses may fail despite funding.

Social and Cultural Barriers: Gender norms may restrict women entrepreneurs from using loans independently and expanding businesses. Family control over finances can limit impact

Lack of Collateral-Free Large Credit: While microfinance is collateral-free, larger loans are not easily available.

Risk of Business Failure: Rural businesses are highly vulnerable to weather conditions and market fluctuations. This failure makes repayment difficult, leading to debt cycles

Digital Divide: Due to increasing shift to digital finance many rural entrepreneurs lack access to smartphones or internet. Also, there is limited use of modern financial services

While microfinance provides crucial financial access, rural entrepreneurs face challenges like high costs, limited credit, lack of training, and structural barriers. Addressing these issues requires better policy support, financial literacy programs, and integrated rural development strategies.

Policy Implications

Effective policies must adopt a holistic approach by combining financial services with training, infrastructure, and regulatory support to fully realize the potential of microfinance in promoting rural entrepreneurship. Some are:

Interest Rate Regulation and Transparency: Governments should ensure that microfinance institutions maintain reasonable and transparent interest rates**.** Clear disclosure of loan terms, hidden charges, and repayment conditions can protect rural entrepreneurs from exploitation and over-indebtedness.

Enhancing Credit Limits and Flexible Products: Policies should promote higher loan ceilings and diversified financial products (working capital loans, seasonal loans,

insurance). This enables rural entrepreneurs to expand beyond subsistence-level activities and manage irregular income cycles effectively.

Integration of Skill Development and Training: Microfinance policies must be linked with entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, and skill development programs. Providing only credit is insufficient; capacity-building ensures better utilization of funds and improves business success rates.

S*trengthening Institutional Framework:* There is a need to strengthen the regulation and monitoring of microfinance institutions and Self-Help Groups (SHGs). Policies should ensure accountability, prevention of multiple lending, better governance and transparency. This builds trust and sustainability in the system.

Promoting Financial Inclusion and Digital Access: Governments should expand digital financial infrastructure in rural areas through mobile banking, digital payments, simplified KYC norms. Bridging the digital divide will make microfinance more accessible, efficient, and inclusive.

Market Linkages and Infrastructure Support: Policy focus should go beyond finance to include market access for rural products, storage, transport, and supply chain infrastructure and support for cooperatives and rural enterprises. This ensures that entrepreneurs can sell their products profitably, making microfinance more impactful.

Recommendations

For microfinance to succeed in rural entrepreneurship, it must go beyond credit and adopt a holistic approach combining finance, skills, infrastructure, and institutional support. A few recommendations can be followed:

Improve Financial Literacy and Awareness: Rural entrepreneurs should be educated about loan terms and interest rates, savings and investment practices, basic business planning. Financial literacy programs help borrowers make informed decisions, avoid over-indebtedness, and utilize funds more effectively.

Provide Skill Development and Entrepreneurial Training: Microfinance should be combined with vocational training, business management skills, marketing and digital skills. This ensures that borrowers can run sustainable and profitable enterprises rather than just accessing credit.

Ensure Affordable and Flexible Credit: Microfinance institutions should offer loans at reasonable interest rates, provide flexible repayment schedules aligned with seasonal incomes, increase loan sizes for business expansion. This reduces financial stress and supports long-term growth.

Strengthen Institutional Support and Monitoring: Effective regulation and supervision are essential to prevent multiple lending and loan defaults, ensure transparency and accountability of MFIs and SHGs, build trust among rural entrepreneurs. Strong institutions make microfinance more reliable and sustainable.

Promote Market Linkages and Infrastructure Development: Success depends not just on finance but also on access to markets for selling products, better transport, storage and supply chains, support for cooperatives and rural network. This helps entrepreneurs generate steady income and repay loans comfortably.

Conclusion

Microfinance Institutions have played a transformative role in promoting rural entrepreneurship in India by providing financial access, fostering self-employment, and empowering marginalized communities. The widespread reach of SHGs and NABARD-supported initiatives demonstrates the sector's effectiveness.

However, for sustained impact, it is essential to address challenges such as financial literacy, regional disparities, and high borrowing costs. With appropriate policy support and institutional strengthening, microfinance can serve as a powerful engine for inclusive and sustainable rural development in India.

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ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE IMPHAL VALLEY: ATTITUDINAL INSIGHTS ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS

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Abstract

This study investigates the attitudes toward artificial intelligence (AI) among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region of Manipur, India. Using a cross-sectional descriptive survey design, data were collected from 384 entrepreneurs through the Artificial Intelligence Attitude Scale (Aktay, 2024). The analysis explored overall attitudes and differences across demographic variables such as gender, age, locality, and educational qualification. Findings revealed that entrepreneurs generally held positive attitudes toward AI. While no significant differences were observed based on gender, age, or locality, educational qualification was found to significantly influence AI attitudes, with more educated participants showing more favorable perceptions. The study highlights the need for targeted AI literacy and support programs to ensure inclusive technological growth in regional entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence, Entrepreneurs, Attitude, Manipur, Education*

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is transforming industries worldwide, significantly impacting entrepreneurship, innovation, and decision-making processes (Russell & Norvig, 2021). Entrepreneurs, as drivers of economic activity and technological adoption, play a critical role in shaping how AI is perceived and integrated into small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly in emerging economies. Understanding their attitudes toward AI is vital for effective technology diffusion and policy formulation.

In the context of India's north-eastern region, especially Manipur's Imphal Valley, the entrepreneurial ecosystem is marked by a mix of traditional business practices and emerging tech-driven opportunities. However, limited research exists on how local entrepreneurs view the risks, benefits, and practical uses of AI. Since attitudes can influence readiness for adoption and innovation behavior (Venkatesh et al., 2003), exploring these perceptions is essential for tailored interventions and inclusive digital transformation.

This study seeks to examine the attitudes toward AI among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region, considering demographic factors such as age, gender, locality, and educational qualification. The findings aim to provide insight into the socio-psychological and educational factors that influence AI acceptance in a region with unique socio-economic and cultural dynamics.

Rationale of the Study

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming the global entrepreneurial landscape, offering tools that enhance productivity, decision-making, and customer engagement. In India, the integration of AI technologies in business is gaining momentum, particularly among micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). However, the extent to which entrepreneurs understand, accept, and are prepared to adopt AI varies significantly across regions and socio-demographic groups. The Imphal Valley region of Manipur, though economically vibrant and culturally diverse, remains underrepresented in national discourses on AI adoption and digital innovation.

Entrepreneurs in this region face unique challenges related to infrastructure, digital literacy, and resource accessibility. Exploring their attitudes toward AI is crucial for designing effective policy interventions and training programs that promote inclusive technological growth. Understanding these attitudes can also help stakeholders identify potential barriers to adoption and areas where awareness or capacity-building efforts are most needed. Despite the growing relevance of AI, there is a scarcity of empirical research focusing on entrepreneurs' perceptions in the North-eastern region of India. This study addresses that gap by providing region-specific insights that can inform both academic understanding and practical policy.

Statement of the Problem

While Artificial Intelligence is becoming a central component of business innovation globally, its acceptance and implementation among entrepreneurs in regional and underserved areas remain uneven. In the context of the Imphal Valley region of Manipur, little is known about how entrepreneurs perceive AI – whether they view it as a beneficial tool, a disruptive force, or something beyond their reach. Given the socio-economic and educational diversity of the region, attitudes toward AI may vary based on factors such as age, gender, locality, and educational qualification.

The lack of empirical data on this subject limits the ability of policymakers, educators, and technology developers to create targeted strategies for AI adoption in the region. Without understanding the psychological and demographic factors influencing entrepreneurs' attitudes, efforts to promote digital entrepreneurship may fall short. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the overall attitudes of entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley toward artificial intelligence and examine how these attitudes differ across key demographic variables.

Review of Literature

Attitudes toward Artificial Intelligence (AI) among entrepreneurs have become an increasingly important area of inquiry as AI continues to transform the business landscape. Recent research suggests that entrepreneurs generally hold positive attitudes toward AI, recognizing its potential to enhance opportunity

recognition, strategic decision-making, operational efficiency, and innovation outcomes (Giuggioli & Pellegrini, 2022; Schiavone et al., 2022). The integration of AI into entrepreneurial processes is viewed as a strategic advantage, enabling startups and small businesses to streamline tasks, optimize resource allocation, and improve responsiveness to market demands.

While the literature indicates a growing acknowledgment of AI's transformative power, many studies focus more on the functional impact of AI rather than explicitly examining entrepreneurs' attitudinal orientations. For example, Lévesque et al. (2020) argue for the integration of AI into entrepreneurship research, emphasizing the relevance of AI for enhancing entrepreneurial scholarship and practice. However, their work centres on the implications for academic research rather than on entrepreneurs' perceptions or attitudes toward AI adoption in real-world settings.

Similarly, Csaszar et al. (2024) explore how AI can assist with strategic decision-making by generating and evaluating options, yet their focus remains on cognitive augmentation and not on entrepreneurs' subjective responses to AI technologies. König (2024) presents a broader theoretical framework of AI acceptance, encompassing concepts such as user acceptance, delegation acceptance, and societal adoption acceptance. Although these frameworks may be tangentially relevant to entrepreneurs, they do not specifically analyze entrepreneurial attitudes.

Grashof and Kopka (2022) investigate how AI knowledge affects radical innovation, especially in the context of SMEs versus large firms. While their findings highlight the role of AI in driving innovation, the study does not directly address how entrepreneurs perceive or emotionally respond to AI integration in their business practices.

In summary, while existing literature affirms the increasing utility and strategic role of AI in entrepreneurship, there remains a notable gap in empirical research directly assessing entrepreneurs' attitudes toward AI, particularly in emerging markets and regional contexts. This gap underscores the need for region-specific studies—such as the present investigation of entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region—to understand how socio-demographic factors influence perceptions and readiness to adopt AI in entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Objectives

To assess the overall attitudes toward artificial intelligence among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region; To examine whether attitudes toward artificial intelligence differ significantly based on gender; To determine whether there are significant differences in attitudes toward artificial intelligence across different age groups; To investigate whether locality (rural vs. urban) influences entrepreneurs' attitudes toward artificial intelligence; To analyze differences in attitudes toward artificial intelligence based on educational qualification.

Null Hypotheses

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in attitudes toward artificial intelligence between male and female entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region; H_{02}: There

is no significant difference in attitudes toward artificial intelligence among entrepreneurs across different age groups; H_{03}: There is no significant difference in attitudes toward artificial intelligence between entrepreneurs from rural and urban localities; H_{04}: There is no significant difference in attitudes toward artificial intelligence among entrepreneurs with different educational qualifications.

Methodology

Research Design: This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design to investigate the attitudes of entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region toward artificial intelligence (AI). The design was appropriate for collecting quantitative data at a single point in time, enabling the exploration of variations in attitudes across key demographic variables such as age, gender, locality, and educational qualification.

Participants: The target population comprised entrepreneurs operating within the Imphal Valley region of Manipur. As the total population of entrepreneurs was unknown, a sample size of 384 participants was determined using Cochran's formula for an unknown population size, assuming a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques was employed to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria, ensuring relevant and diverse representation from the entrepreneur community.

Table 1 - Participants' socio-demographic characteristics

	Variables	F	Percentage
Gender	Male	186	48.44
	Female	198	51.56
	Total	*384*	*100.00*
Age	18 – 25 years	32	8.33
	26 – 35 years	85	22.14
	36 – 45 years	123	32.03
	46 – 55 years	121	31.51
	56 years and above	23	5.99
	Total	*384*	*100.00*
Locality	Rural	174	45.31
	Urban	210	54.69
	Total	*384*	*100.00*
Educational qualification	Below Higher Secondary	34	8.85
	Higher Secondary (10+2)	120	31.25
	Undergraduate	127	33.07
	Postgraduate and above	78	20.31
	Tech./Voc. Diploma	25	6.51
	Total	*384*	*100.00*

The study included a total of 384 participants. In terms of gender, 48.44% identified as male (n = 186), while 51.56% identified as female (n = 198). Regarding age distribution, 8.33% of participants were between 18 and 25 years (n = 32), 22.14% were aged 26 to 35 years (n = 85), 32.03% fell within the 36 to 45 years age group (n = 123), and 31.51% were aged 46 to 55 years (n = 121). Only 5.99% (n = 23) were aged 56 years and above. With respect to locality, 45.31% (n = 174) of the participants reported residing in rural areas, whereas 54.69% (n = 210) resided in urban areas. In terms of educational qualifications,

8.85% (n = 34) had educational attainment below higher secondary, 31.25% (n = 120) had completed higher secondary (10+2), 33.07% (n = 127) held an undergraduate degree, 20.31% (n = 78) had completed postgraduate or higher degrees, and 6.51% (n = 25) had obtained a technical or vocational diploma.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria: Entrepreneurs operating within the Imphal Valley region of Manipur, including both urban and semi-urban areas; Individuals who own or manage a business (registered or unregistered), regardless of business size or sector; Entrepreneurs aged 18 years and above; Those who voluntarily consent to participate in the study; Participants who are able to understand and respond to the questionnaire in English or a language they are comfortable with.

Exclusion Criteria: Individuals who are not actively involved in managing or owning a business (e.g., employees, interns, volunteers); Entrepreneurs who are temporarily inactive (e.g., on long-term leave or whose businesses are currently non-operational); Respondents who fail to complete the questionnaire or provide inconsistent/incomplete responses; Individuals below 18 years of age; Participants who do not provide informed consent to participate in the study.

Instrument: Data were collected using the Artificial Intelligence Attitude Scale developed by Aktay et al. (2024). This standardized instrument comprises 13 items measuring attitudes toward AI across three subscales: Benefits of AI (Items 1–3), Risks of AI (Items 4–7; negatively worded), and Use of AI (Items 8–13). Participants responded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Total scores range from 13 to 65, with higher scores reflecting more positive attitudes toward AI. The scale has demonstrated satisfactory reliability: overall Cronbach's alpha = 0.802, with subscale alphas of 0.781 (benefits), 0.732 (risks), and 0.679 (use).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was initiated following the acquisition of informed consent from all participants. The self-administered questionnaire was completed under supervised conditions to ensure consistency and reliability in responses. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured throughout the process.

Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS (version 22). Descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviations, and standard errors were computed to summarize participants' responses. To explore group differences in attitudes based on demographic characteristics, independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVA were conducted. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ was used to determine statistical significance in hypothesis testing.

Results

The overall attitude toward artificial intelligence

Table 2 - The overall attitude toward artificial intelligence

Variable	N	Mean	SD	SEM
Overall Attitude Score	384	55.61	4.83	1.14

The overall attitude toward artificial intelligence among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region was assessed using the Artificial Intelligence Attitude Scale. The results indicated a highly positive attitude, with a mean score of 55.61 (SD = 4.83, SEM = 1.14) out of a possible 65. This suggests that most participants perceived AI favourably in terms of its benefits, usage, and risks. The relatively low standard error of the mean indicates a consistent pattern of responses across the sample, reflecting a shared perception of AI among the surveyed entrepreneurs.

Difference in Attitude towards AI by gender

Table 3 - Difference in Attitude towards AI by gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t	p-value
Male	186	55.6667	5.14782	1.71594	.047	.983
Female	198	55.5556	4.79873	1.59958		

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare attitudes toward artificial intelligence between male and female entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region. The results indicated that male entrepreneurs (M = 55.67, SD = 5.15) and female entrepreneurs (M = 55.56, SD = 4.80) had nearly identical mean scores. The difference was not statistically significant, t (382) = 0.047, p = .983. These results suggest that gender does not significantly influence attitudes toward AI among the entrepreneurs surveyed.

Difference in Attitude towards AI by locality

Table 4 - Difference in Attitude towards AI by locality

Locality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	p-value
Rural	174	55.8182	4.51261	1.36060	.222	.827
Urban	210	55.2857	5.64843	2.13491		

An independent samples *t*-test was conducted to examine whether entrepreneurs' attitudes toward artificial intelligence differed by locality. The results showed that rural entrepreneurs (M = 55.82, SD = 4.51) scored slightly higher than urban entrepreneurs (M = 55.29, SD = 5.65). However, this difference was not statistically significant, t (382) = 0.222, p = .827. These findings indicate that locality (rural vs. urban) does not have a significant impact on attitudes toward AI among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region.

Difference in Attitude towards AI by age

Table 5 - Descriptives

					95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
Age	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
18 – 25 years	32	47.50	3.54	2.50	15.73	79.27
26 – 35 years	85	57.50	2.12	1.50	38.44	76.56
36 – 45 years	123	58.00	4.73	1.93	53.03	62.97
46 – 55 years	121	55.25	3.86	1.93	49.10	61.40
56 years and above	23	55.50	4.04	2.02	49.07	61.93
Total	384	55.61	4.83	1.14	53.21	58.01

Table 6 - ANOVA

AAI Score	SS	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	173.528	4	43.382	2.532	.091
Within Groups	222.750	379	17.135		
Total	396.278	383			

Table 7 - Multiple comparisons

(I) age	(J) age	M. Diff. (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
18 – 25 years	26 – 35 years	-10.00	4.14	0.17	-23.03	3.03
	36 – 45 years	-10.50	3.38	0.05	-21.14	0.14
	46 – 55 years	-7.75	3.58	0.25	-19.04	3.54
	56 years and above	-8.00	3.58	0.23	-19.29	3.29
26 – 35 years	18 – 25 years	10.00	4.14	0.17	-3.03	23.03
	36 – 45 years	-0.50	3.38	1.00	-11.14	10.14
	46 – 55 years	2.25	3.58	0.97	-9.04	13.54
	56 years and above	2.00	3.58	0.98	-9.29	13.29
36 – 45 years	18 – 25 years	10.50	3.38	0.05	-0.14	21.14
	26 – 35 years	0.50	3.38	1.00	-10.14	11.14
	46 – 55 years	2.75	2.67	0.84	-5.66	11.16
	56 years and above	2.50	2.67	0.88	-5.91	10.91
46 – 55 years	18 – 25 years	7.75	3.58	0.25	-3.54	19.04
	26 – 35 years	-2.25	3.58	0.97	-13.54	9.04
	36 – 45 years	-2.75	2.67	0.84	-11.16	5.66
	56 years and above	-0.25	2.93	1.00	-9.47	8.97
56 years and above	18 – 25 years	8.00	3.58	0.23	-3.29	19.29
	26 – 35 years	-2.00	3.58	0.98	-13.29	9.29
	36 – 45 years	-2.50	2.67	0.88	-10.91	5.91
	46 – 55 years	0.25	2.93	1.00	-8.97	9.47

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in attitudes toward artificial intelligence (AI) among entrepreneurs across different age groups. The results revealed that the differences in mean scores among the five age groups were not statistically significant, $F(4, 379) = 2.53$, $p = .091$, although the effect was approaching significance.

Descriptive statistics showed that the 36–45 years group had the highest mean attitude score (M = 58.00, SD = 4.73), followed by the 26–35 years group **(**M = 57.50, SD **=** 2.12), while the 18–25 years group reported the lowest mean score (M = 47.50, SD = 3.54). Despite these numerical differences, the Tukey HSD post hoc test indicated that none of the pairwise comparisons reached statistical significance at the .05 level, though the difference between the 18–25 and 36–45 age groups was marginally significant ($p = .050$).

These findings suggest that while entrepreneurs in the 36–45 age group tend to show more favorable attitudes toward AI and those in the youngest group (18–25 years) tend to show lower attitudes, age-based differences were not statistically significant at the conventional threshold. Therefore, age may not be a strong predictor of attitudes toward AI among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region.

Difference in Attitude towards AI by educational qualification

Table 8 - Descriptives

Educational qualification	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Below Higher Secondary	34	48.50	2.38	1.19	44.71	52.29
Higher Secondary (10+2)	120	53.00	4.24	3.00	14.88	91.12

Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)	127	57.20	2.49	1.11	54.11	60.29
Postgraduate and above	78	59.20	1.79	0.80	56.98	61.42
Technical/Vocational Diploma	25	59.50	0.71	0.50	53.15	65.85
Total	384	55.61	4.83	1.14	53.21	58.01

Table 9 - ANOVA

AAI Score	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	323.178	4	80.794	14.368	.000
Within Groups	73.100	379	5.623		
Total	396.278	383			

Table 10 - Multiple Comparisons

(I) Educational Qualification	(J) Educational Qualification	M. Diff. (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Below Higher Secondary	Higher Secondary (10+2)	-4.50	2.05	.242	-10.97	1.97
	Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)	-8.70*	1.59	.001	-13.71	-3.69
	Postgraduate and above	-10.70*	1.59	.000	-15.71	-5.69
	Technical/Vocational Diploma	-11.00*	2.05	.001	-17.47	-4.53
Higher Secondary (10+2)	Below Higher Secondary	4.50	2.05	.242	-1.97	10.97
	Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)	-4.20	1.98	.270	-10.45	2.05
	Postgraduate and above	-6.20	1.98	.052	-12.45	0.05
	Technical/Vocational Diploma	-6.50	2.37	.101	-13.97	0.97
Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)	Below Higher Secondary	8.70*	1.59	.001	3.69	13.71
	Higher Secondary (10+2)	4.20	1.98	.270	-2.05	10.45
	Postgraduate and above	-2.00	1.50	.677	-6.72	2.72
	Technical/Vocational Diploma	-2.30	1.98	.773	-8.55	3.95
Postgraduate and above	Below Higher Secondary	10.70*	1.59	.000	5.69	15.71
	Higher Secondary (10+2)	6.20	1.98	.052	-0.05	12.45
	Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)	2.00	1.50	.677	-2.72	6.72
	Technical/Vocational Diploma	-0.30	1.98	1.00	-6.55	5.95
Technical/Vocational Diploma	Below Higher Secondary	11.00*	2.05	.001	4.53	17.47
	Higher Secondary (10+2)	6.50	2.37	.101	-0.97	13.97
	Undergraduate (Bachelor's degree)	2.30	1.98	.773	-3.95	8.55
	Postgraduate and above	0.30	1.98	1.00	-5.95	6.55

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine whether attitudes toward artificial intelligence (AI) differed significantly among entrepreneurs with varying educational qualifications. The results indicated a statistically significant difference**,** F (4, 379) = 14.37, $p < .001$, suggesting that educational qualification significantly influences attitudes toward AI.

Descriptive statistics showed that participants with a postgraduate degree (M = 59.20, SD = 1.79) and technical/vocational diploma (M = 59.50, SD = 0.71) reported the most favorable attitudes toward AI. In contrast, those with education below higher secondary level (M = 48.50, SD = 2.38) had the lowest mean attitude scores.

Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test revealed that participants with postgraduate and above qualifications had significantly higher attitudes toward AI than those with below higher secondary education ($p < .001$). Similarly, those with undergraduate degrees and technical/vocational diplomas also had significantly higher AI attitude scores compared to the below higher secondary group ($p = .001$ for both). However, no significant differences were observed between the higher educational groups themselves (e.g., postgraduate vs. diploma holders).

These results indicate that higher educational attainment is associated with more favorable attitudes toward artificial intelligence among entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley. Entrepreneurs with lower levels of formal education may benefit from targeted awareness and capacity-building programs to enhance their understanding and acceptance of AI technologies.

Discussion of the Findings

This study aimed to examine the attitudes of entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region toward artificial intelligence (AI), with attention to demographic variables such as gender, age, locality, and educational qualification. The findings offer important insights into how entrepreneurs perceive AI in a region where digital transformation is still emerging.

Overall Attitudes toward AI: The overall mean score on the Artificial Intelligence Attitude Scale indicated a generally positive attitude toward AI among entrepreneurs. This aligns with broader findings that entrepreneurs, particularly in developing economies, increasingly view AI as a tool for efficiency, innovation, and competitiveness (Zhang & Lu, 2021). The favorable attitude may also reflect the growing penetration of AI-based services in India, such as digital payments, customer analytics, and automated business solutions (NITI Aayog, 2018).

Gender Differences: The results showed no significant difference in attitudes toward AI between male and female entrepreneurs**.** This suggests that in the entrepreneurial context of Imphal Valley, attitudes toward emerging technologies like AI are not significantly shaped by gender. Similar results have been observed in previous studies, where gender differences in technology adoption attitudes were minimal among business owners (Marakarkandy et al., 2017). This may indicate a narrowing digital gender gap in entrepreneurship within semi-urban and urban settings.

Locality-Based Differences : The analysis revealed no significant difference in AI attitudes between rural and urban entrepreneurs. This is a noteworthy finding, as rural entrepreneurs are often assumed to have limited exposure to digital technologies. However, the proliferation of smartphones, mobile internet, and government schemes like Digital India may have contributed to increased technological awareness even in rural areas (Pradhan et al., 2020). This convergence between rural and urban perceptions supports the idea of an increasingly connected entrepreneurial landscape in India.

Age Differences: Although descriptive statistics indicated some variation in attitudes across age groups – particularly lower scores among the youngest group (18–25 years) – the differences were not statistically significant. This contradicts some earlier studies suggesting that younger individuals are typically more open to adopting new technologies (Venkatesh et al., 2003). One possible explanation is that older entrepreneurs in this region may have more experience or exposure to practical business applications of AI, leading to more positive perceptions despite their age.

Educational Qualification Differences: The study found a statistically significant difference in AI attitudes based on educational qualification. Entrepreneurs with

higher education levels, particularly those with postgraduate degrees or technical/vocational diplomas, had significantly more favorable attitudes compared to those with lower educational attainment. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that education enhances digital literacy and technology adoption (Rogers, 2003; Al-Emran et al., 2018). Those with more education may have better access to training, exposure to AI concepts, and the confidence to apply such technologies in their businesses.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that while demographic factors like gender, locality, and age do not significantly influence entrepreneurs' attitudes toward AI in the Imphal Valley region, educational qualification plays a critical rol**e**. These results emphasize the need for targeted AI awareness and skill-building program**s** for entrepreneurs with lower educational backgrounds to ensure inclusive technological advancement.

The present study, while providing valuable insights into the attitudes of entrepreneurs in the Imphal Valley region toward artificial intelligence, is subject to certain limitations. Firstly, the sample was selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of entrepreneurs in Manipur or other regions. Secondly, the reliance on self-reported data may have introduced response biases, such as social desirability or a lack of full understanding of AI-related concepts among some participants. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study captures attitudes at a single point in time and does not account for potential changes over time or the influence of emerging technologies and policies.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a foundation for future research and policy development. It is recommended that future studies adopt larger and more diverse samples across multiple districts to enhance generalizability. Longitudinal research could provide deeper insights into how attitudes toward AI evolve with increased exposure and technological advancements. Policymakers and training institutions are encouraged to develop targeted AI literacy programs, especially for entrepreneurs with lower educational qualifications, to bridge knowledge gaps and promote equitable technology adoption across all segments of the entrepreneurial community.

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HANDICRAFT-TECH: A UNIFIED DIGITAL PLATFORM TO EMPOWER INDIA'S DESIGN ENTREPRENEURS

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Abstract

India's handicraft sector, the country's second-largest employer, significantly underperforms in the global market, holding only a 2% share compared to China's 30%. This disparity stems from a fragmented support system that leaves over seven million craftspeople trapped in poverty. It is vital to connect artisan talent with market opportunities, yet their growth is hindered by relying on a patchwork of separate digital tools for e-commerce, artisan management, and marketing. This paper introduces 'HandiCraft-tech', a proposal for a unified online platform designed to address these systemic challenges. The platform provides design entrepreneurs with a single, end-to-end solution integrating essential business tools, fostering design innovation, and facilitating access to international markets. By empowering these entrepreneurs, HandiCraft-tech aims to help build scalable and ethical craft-based businesses that can align India's rich craft heritage with its global economic aspirations. The conceptual framework is an innovation hub first and an e-commerce platform second, designed to digitally enable the Triple Helix Model of Innovation (Craftspeople, Academics, and Government).

Keywords: *Design Entrepreneurship, Indian Handicrafts, Artisan Empowerment, Digital platform, Sustainable Livelihoods*

India's multi-product handicraft sector, vital to sustaining rural livelihoods and the nation's economy, faces significant challenges in the modern globalized market. Rapid industrialization and mass production have marginalized traditional crafts, leaving artisans struggling with declining demand, poor infrastructure, and limited market access. The sector is highly fragmented, with artisans disconnected from contemporary design innovations. This study proposes leveraging design thinking and design entrepreneurship to integrate contemporary design with traditional craft practices, ensuring these clusters become a prosperous part of the mainstream creative economy.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this research is to investigate how design thinking and innovation can be leveraged through for developing a sustainable model for the growth of the Indian handicraft sector. By exploring the potential of design as a tool for innovation, the research seeks to promote inclusive economic growth that benefits artisans, enhances the value of traditional crafts, and integrates these practices into the broader creative economy.

This study focuses on key research questions including: What are the specific challenges faced by artisans in India?; How can theoretical frameworks like the Triple Helix Model be adapted to create a collaborative and sustainable ecosystem for the handicraft industry?; What core features and functionalities are required for a unified platform to effectively foster sustainable livelihoods and global market access for Indian crafts?

Rationale for the Study

The rationale behind this research lies in the need for a systemic approach to revive and sustain India's handicrafts sector. Existing models for craft development often fail to account for the complexities for regional diversity, artisanal skills, and the socio-economic ecosystem. This paper argues for a digital platform to foster innovation in the craft sector. This will help the sector to be prepared to meet future market needs while maintaining the essence of traditional heritage. This spirit of innovation can lead to sustainable models that help craftspeople not just meet their daily needs, but prepare for a sustainable future and thrive. With the support of new-age digital technology with traditional craftsmanship, handicrafts will see product-service development in a new light, for a more adaptable future locally and at a global level.

Literature Review

The foundational literature review explores three primary interconnected areas essential for understanding a multi-cluster development approach. Specifically, the research considers the field of handicrafts development and effective strategies for sustainable cluster development models.

Handicraft Development in India

Handicrafts products are made by skilled craftspeople using manual techniques and traditional knowledge passed down through generations. The origin of the word handicraft combines the Old English 'hand' and 'craft', reflecting the importance of dexterity and expertise. Despite their deep cultural significance, India's handicraft sector faces many challenges such as restricted market access, weak infrastructure, and inadequate financial support. The 19th-century Art and Craft Movement, championed by William Morris, brought renewed attention to the value of craftsmanship as a meaningful response to industrialization. Morris famously argued that 'creative human occupation is essential for meaningful life' - an idea that continues to inspire Indian artisans who are now competing with mass-produced goods. (Morris, n.d.; MacCarthy, 2009). In India, figures such as Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi recognized the handicraft sector as a vital force for social and economic progress. Gandhi, in particular, promoted the idea that craftwork was not only integral to holistic education, but also to the country's development and the dignity of its artisans. His vision of self-reliance continues to shape approaches to handicraft policy and development today. (Nandi & Singh, 2023). Similarly, Pupul Jayakar was a central figure in the revival of traditional Indian crafts in the 20th century. By founding institutions like the National Crafts Museum and advocating for India's rich craft traditions, she helped bring recognition and renewed energy to the sector, both in India and abroad. (Jayakar, 1980).

Design Innovation and Its Role in Handicraft Development

Design innovation is essential for revitalizing traditional crafts in today's dynamic market. At its core, design means thoughtfully planning products to meet real needs, while innovation brings new value to the table. (Ceschin & Gaziulusoy, 2016; Li et al., 2019). Design-driven innovation—rooted in user-centered design thinking—can transform how crafts are created and shared. In handicrafts, a 'cluster' is a regional group of artisans or small businesses in the same craft,

fostering resource sharing and knowledge exchange. (Brown & Kātz, 2009). The Triple Helix Model of Innovation, which unites academia, industry, and government, is a powerful tool for craft clusters. By combining local expertise, business drive, and policy support, clusters can set up design labs and innovation hubs for practical, sustainable product creation. Handicrafts support millions of livelihoods, preserve culture, and contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. However, development programs often overlook the unique needs of different craft clusters - a gap best addressed by embracing innovation, collaboration, and adaptability. (Adamson, 2010).

The Digital Imperative

Design can work both at the back-end, making much-needed changes in the craft processes and making systems as well as at the front end, taking the craft to the right consumer and positioning it in the market. However, the sector faces many challenges due to the fragmented nature of this unorganized sector. They are often unable to compete with the competing products from the mass-manufactured organized sector. They often end up using a patchwork of digital tools but lack a cohesive direction and platform which can help them unify the various offerings essential for innovation management.

Gaps in existing models

The existing handicraft innovation models lack many key features. These gaps prevent the sector from continuous innovation practices and contribute to sectoral growth. Many of the models lack the dynamism required in a continuously changing eco-system. They also often fail or are limited in their success due to the same approach for all clusters. The handicraft clusters are diverse with different requirements, challenges and possibilities. A model which takes into consideration this diversity is required. It should also be agile enough to factor in the changes in the eco-system. Therefore, a model which considers the dynamic nature of the handicraft sector, its uniqueness and integration of design innovation is required. Continuous innovation considering the entire life cycle of handicraft products is required. It also needs to be sustainable in terms of economic, environmental and social sustainability parameters. This holistic approach will help to ensure that the craft sector remains viable in the long term and will contribute towards its growth.



Fig. 1. Limitations of the handicraft sector

Methodology

This research study uses a largely qualitative approach. The approach is pragmatic in nature and is practice based with the view to bring about a real-life connection and make a meaningful contribution to the handicraft sector. Case study-based approach considering the diverse views of many stakeholders was used. As part of the case study method interviews, observational study and ethnographic approaches to collate observational study with cultural meaning-making were primarily used. The detailed case study conducted for this study is focused on the Miraj Musical Instrument Cluster. The approach taken here ensures an in-depth understanding of factors related to design innovation, the concerns, challenges and aspirations related to this sector.

Research Design

Detailed qualitative study enables a comprehensive investigation of the entire life cycle of the handicraft products and stakeholders associated with it at every stage. This includes studying the structure of the clusters, the making process, the craftsmanship involved, the cultural meanings associated with it, product innovations, infrastructural support mechanisms for innovations, marketing strategies and outreach activities. The research study also encompasses a longitudinal approach through interviewing multiple generations of artisans. This gave important insights regarding the evolution of the craft and the perception of different generations of artisans with respect to their craft. This approach is especially important in the handicraft sector because the knowledge of the craft is passed from one generation to the other. The practice-based research approach ensured that the study was grounded in real life experiences and facts. This would then become the basis for developing features and frameworks for understanding how design innovation can be integrated with the handicraft sector for its survival and growth.

Primary research: Data Collection Methods for Cluster study

The study employed multiple methods of data collection to ensure a holistic understanding of a cluster's functioning using a detailed case study method. Direct field observations were conducted to document the craft-making process. This included visiting Miraj musical instrument making cluster to get an in depth understanding of the various processes and methods through which these instruments are made. Observations focused on key aspects such as Product design and production processes, Ergonomics and workspace arrangements and the interaction between artisans and the tools or machinery used in production. Field visits allowed the researcher to gather first-hand insights into the daily operations of the cluster, as well as the challenges faced by artisans, such as lack of cohesion in the structure of the clusters as well as infrastructure conducive to craft requirements. Interviews and Focus Groups In-depth interviews were conducted with 25 craftspersons across 10 families within the Miraj cluster. The interviewees included master artisans, emerging craftspersons, and community leaders.



The interviews helped in the study of all aspects related to design innovation - the cultural significance and traditional aspects impacting innovation, challenges related to market outreach and consumer connect, the problems related to the rise of digital device and competition from digital musical applications, the lack of musical training prevalent among the younger generation, the uniqueness of this craft practice and the latent potential for design innovation in this sector. Apart from this, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with designers and design entrepreneurs to understand the broader challenges faced by this sector at the policy level and larger market dynamics. It also helped in further understanding the inter-generational divide, the lack of interest in the younger generation to pursue the craft and the aptitude and sense of craftsmanship for it.
The study also included a detailed study of a document i.e. a project report document pertaining to the need assessment study for the Miraj cluster. This helped to get a historical overview of this cluster and compare the changes which have happened in the cluster over the years. The report also gave insights into the experiments done towards technological and infrastructural development for this cluster and the results at a practical level.
The visual documentation of the craft cluster including the study of the workspaces, the tools, making process and retail shops provided further insights about the cluster. Thus, data collection took a triangulation approach, gathering data from multiple sources and persons.

Table 1 - Analysis: Aspects, Problems Identified, and Research Methods Used in the Study of the Miraj Craft Cluster

Aspects of the Miraj Craft Cluster	Problems Identified	Research Methods Used
Product Design & Production Processes	Limited design innovation; dependence on traditional techniques; restricted experimentation and diversification	Direct field observations; in-depth interviews with artisans
Ergonomics & Workspace Arrangements	Inadequate infrastructure; poor workspace design; lack of cohesion and structural organization within the cluster	Field visits; photographic documentation
Artisan–Tool Interaction	Outdated tools and machinery; minimal technological advancement; absence of ergonomic considerations in tool use	Field observation of production processes; artisan interviews; process documentation

Cultural & Traditional Aspects	Traditional beliefs influencing design adaptability; erosion of cultural transmission and artisanal identity among younger generations	In-depth interviews with master artisans and community leaders; focus group discussions
Market Outreach & Consumer Connect	Weak market linkages; limited promotional outreach; competition from digital musical devices and apps	Interviews and focus group discussions with artisans; market observation
Inter-Generational Dynamics	Declining interest among youth; lack of musical training; diminishing motivation to continue the craft	semi-structured interviews with young craftspersons and senior artisans
Technological & Infrastructural Development	Incomplete or ineffective technological initiatives; inadequate infrastructure supporting production and innovation	Document study (Need Assessment Project Report); comparative analysis of past and present conditions
Policy-Level & Sectoral Challenges	Insufficient government support; policy implementation gaps; weak institutional and cluster-level coordination	Interviews with designers review of project documents
Visual & Spatial Understanding of the Cluster	Fragmented workspace distribution; lack of common facility centers; absence of organized production zones	Visual documentation of workspaces

Existing Digital Platforms for Handicraft

With the rise in digital technology, there has been a substantial increase in digital platforms and applications across sectors. The eco-system of digital platform offering supporting various handicrafts in India has also exponentially increased. The analysis of existing digital platforms for Indian handicrafts reveals significant gaps, confirming the necessity of the proposed more focused digital platform conceptual framework. While current platforms excel at e-commerce, they largely fail to integrate the comprehensive innovation and collaborative features outlined in the discussion. Most existing platforms focus heavily on e-commerce and visibility, while innovation, funding, and community integration remain limited. A comprehensive digital platform that merges market access, collaboration, innovation, and empowerment could fill this gap

Theoretical Framework based on Triple Helix Model

To address these gaps, this paper proposes a theoretical framework for a handicraft development model for design innovation. The framework draws on the Triple Helix Model of Innovation to facilitate collaboration between academia, industry, and government, thereby ensuring that clusters have access to the necessary resources and support to thrive in a competitive global marketplace.

The Value Proposition of HandiCraft-tech

The proposed HandiCraft-tech platform represents a strategic solution to these deep-seated problems. By acting as a unified digital nervous system for the sector, it would empower design entrepreneurs to manage their businesses efficiently, bypass exploitative intermediaries, and access a global market on their own terms. The platform would serve as the "industry" vertex in a novel application of the Triple Helix Model, bringing together government and academia to create a collaborative ecosystem for design innovation, skill development, and policy support. Rooted in the Triple Bottom Line philosophy, the platform would aim to generate not only economic value but also profound social and environmental impact.

Table 2 - HandiCraft-tech: Proposed Features and Problem Addressed

Proposed Feature	Problem Addressed
Integrated Artisan & Inventory Management	Fragmented digital toolkit hindering scalability and growth.
Transparent Payments & Financial Inclusion	Exploitation by middlemen and lack of financial stability for artisans.
Marketplace & Global Outreach	Limited market access and inability to compete with mass-produced goods
Branding & Storytelling Toolkit	Fading recognition of cultural heritage and inability to command fair prices.
Centralized Government Scheme Access	Information asymmetry and lack of awareness of government support.
Design & Innovation Collaboration Hub	Perception of crafts as traditional or old-fashioned.

The list of features includes integrated artisan database, inventory management, payment and financial dealings, market retail and outreach, branding and storytelling, access to govt schemes, design and innovation hub for research and development. It creates a truly transformative, rather than merely transactional, digital ecosystem for handicrafts. The conceptual framework for the HandiCraft-tech is designed to address the need for a collaborative, digitally amplified approach to design innovation in Indian handicrafts, moving beyond the limitations of one-to-one intervention models.

Core Focus: Design Innovation

Product/ Process/ Interventions: Focus on craft redesign, material innovation, and new hybrid musical instruments to modernize offerings. Emphasize workflow optimization, collaborative production, documentation, and training. Service/ System Interventions: Involve digital platforms, training modules, and brand-building tools to bridge artisans and consumers. Address cluster-level coordination, infrastructure, and networked support systems (finance, training, and marketing). Policy Interventions: Focus on craft-specific inclusion in government schemes, digital transformation programs, and public–private partnerships.

Stakeholder Integration (Triple Helix Model)

The platform functions as a digital meeting ground for three core groups, reflecting the Triple Helix Model, to ensure comprehensive development: Craftspeople/Artisans: These are the main stakeholders and the repository of traditional skills. They provide the context and skills needed for execution. Their access to current market trends through the platform addresses the problem of their traditional isolation from modern consumer segments. Academics (Designers/Researchers): Their role is to conduct and curate the necessary market research (visual, ethnographic) and technical development (materials, structures, etc.). They use this research to guide innovation. Government/Supporting Agencies: To enable innovation by providing resources and schemes (like the Design Clinic Scheme) for financial support and execution.

Platform Features and Execution

To facilitate the above framework, the platform must integrate several features that enable connection, resource sharing, and commercial viability. The platform

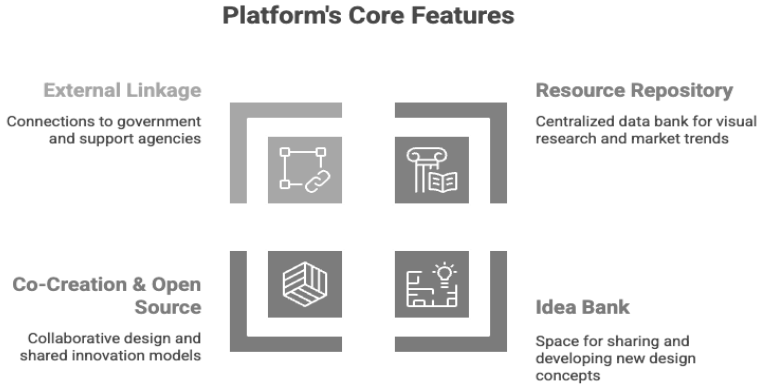
must act as a central repository that aggregates and manages information from various sources, unlike the current one-to-one models.

Visual Research Repository: This databank would host comprehensive visual research and market trends (e.g., images of user segments, home aesthetics) curated by designers, along with technical data on material exploration and process productivity. The goal is to make this research accessible to all craftspeople, helping them understand 'what to make' rather than just 'how to make'.

Idea Bank: This is a dedicated space for posting and sharing new ideas and product concepts, enabling the spread of innovation across the multi-cluster network.

Co-Creation and Open Source: The platform will facilitate co-creation between designers and craftspeople. It must also explore models for open-source designs, where the right to reproduce an innovation is shared, while potentially granting a form of royalty to the initial creators (designer and artisan) to incentivize participation.

External Linkage: Crucial for executing ideas, the platform must provide direct links to government schemes and supporting agencies to help craftspeople or collaborative teams apply for funding and support.



Conclusion

The challenges facing India's multi-billion-dollar handicraft sector - fragmentation, limited market access, and stagnation of traditional crafts - are systemic, requiring a systemic solution. By investigating the contextual background, and the gaps in existing one-to-one intervention models, this study confirms the necessity of a unified digital platform. The proposed HandiCraft-tech platform is more than an online marketplace; it is a conceptual framework designed as an innovation hub first and an e-commerce platform second. Its core value lies in digitally enabling the Triple Helix Model of Innovation by creating a direct link between Craftspeople (skills and context), Academics (market research and technical development), and Government/ Supporting Agencies (financial resources and policy). This integration is crucial for moving beyond the current limitations of isolated clusters and promoting a multi-cluster development model.

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WHEN FEAR BECOMES HOME: PSYCHOLOGICAL HORROR IN SHIRLEY JACKSON AND PETER STRAUB

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Abstract

The most unsettling thing about psychological horror may be how fear moves in and settles. It becomes part of the place where a person lives, thinks, remembers and builds an identity. This essay reads Gothic novels by Shirley Jackson and Peter Straub to show how fear gets internalised and then turns familiar, even comfortable. It traces how domestic space, personal relationships, memory, isolation and uncertainty add to the psychological nastiness of a place, and turn somewhere safe and comforting into somewhere that torments.

Keywords: *Psychological horror; Gothic fiction; Shirley Jackson; Peter Straub; domestic space; the uncanny; memory; isolation; supernatural ambiguity.*

The Gothic tradition has long asked whether places thought to be safe might hold danger. Castles, mansions, family homes, remote villages and respectable communities are all places where the past will not stay past and where social order hides violence. In psychological horror this old design turns inward. Fear grows out of what characters perceive, remember and worry about, and out of the relationships they are caught in. It does not need a monster, a ghost or an obviously menacing building.

Shirley Jackson and Peter Straub are useful writers for tracing this shift. Their styles and historical moments differ, but both treat horror as a strain placed on everyday life. Jackson often writes about fragile identities, people isolated by family demands, gender roles, social suspicion or their own shaky reading of reality.

Psychological Horror and the Gothic Home

Unlike narratives about physical danger, psychological horror makes the mind both the instrument of perception and the place of vulnerability. The reader shares the character's uncertainty and usually gets no reliable answer that would restore order. Fear can come from a sound whose source is unclear, a repeated word that seems to carry an unspoken meaning, a gesture that could be kind or hostile, or a memory whose details shift under pressure.

Theoretical Framework: The Uncanny, the Fantastic and Abjection

Freud's essay "The Uncanny" is a useful place to start in asking why familiar places become frightening. The uncanny is not simply the unfamiliar. It happens when something once intimate comes back in a disturbing form, so that the familiar looks alien. Repetition, doubles, uncertain agency and the return of repressed

material can all produce the effect. A Gothic home suits it well because it is full of personal history.

Shirley Jackson: Domesticity, Isolation and the Unstable Self

Jackson is known for a restrained style and for her attention to the violence that can sit under ordinary social behaviour. Her characters live in worlds governed by rules that seem natural to the people who enforce them. Politeness, family obligation, concern for the neighbours and respectable behaviour can all turn into instruments of control. There is often no easily identified villain, which sharpens the fear.

***The Haunting of Hill House*: A House That Enters the Mind**

In *The Haunting of Hill House*, the house's physical structure and its psychological influence become harder and harder to tell apart. Eleanor Vance arrives hoping to escape a life of obligation, loneliness and dependence. Her earlier experience has left her little room for an independent identity. The invitation to join an investigation of the house offers a short adventure and perhaps a chance to belong to a group.

***We Have Always Lived in the Castle*: Family as Enclosure**

In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, Jackson moves Gothic terror from an apparently supernatural mansion to a family home ringed by suspicion. Mary Katherine Blackwood, known as Merricat, lives with her sister Constance and their uncle Julian. A poisoning has killed several relatives, and the village treats the surviving women with a mixture of fear and fascination. The house shelters them from this hostility, but it also keeps the family isolated.

Peter Straub: Memory, Community and the Return of the Past

Straub's fiction often widens the Gothic field from one person's uncertain perceptions to a web of relationships, histories and shared secrets. His narratives can be formally elaborate, shifting among voices, memories and layers of time. The complexity is not decoration. It mirrors how hard it is to understand events blurred by shame, self-protection and the passing of years. A Straub character's fear may begin privately, but it rarely stays that way.

***Ghost Story*: Collective Guilt and the Haunted Community**

In *Ghost Story*, four old friends in the town of Milburn meet to trade ghost stories. They call themselves the Chowder Society, and the evenings feel harmless: drinks, a fire, a good scare. The stories are not harmless. They circle a secret the men have kept since youth, the death of a young woman, Eva Galli, which they covered up and never discussed. When something starts to come for them, the storytelling that kept the guilt at arm's length turns out to have been a way of rehearsing it. Each tale edges closer to what they will not say aloud.

***Shadowland*: Initiation, Identity and the Unstable Boundaries of Reality**

Shadowland sends two schoolboys, Tom Flanagan and Del Nightingale, to spend a summer at Del's uncle's farm in Vermont. The uncle, Collins Rawlins, is a magician, and the boys come to learn his craft. What begins as tricks and patter slides into something harder to explain, and Tom and Del stop being able to tell where performance ends and the real begins. The novel keeps pushing them

across lines they cannot easily step back over, from boyhood towards something older and from the explicable towards what they were warned off.

Comparative analysis: Two Ways of Making Fear Domestic

The clearest difference between Jackson and Straub is the scale and movement of their narratives. Jackson narrows the reader's attention to a few characters and a limited setting whose meaning shifts as psychological pressure builds. Her prose can make a room or a conversation feel ominous without explaining why. Straub more often builds a wide structure of intersecting histories, memories and supernatural patterns.

Gender, Power and the Meaning of Belonging

Gender is central to what home means psychologically in Jackson's fiction. Domestic space has historically been tied to women's duties and to ideals of care, purity, obedience and emotional service. Jackson exposes the coercion hidden inside those ideals. Eleanor's life before Hill House was shaped by caring for her mother, a duty that limits her independence and leaves her unsure what she wants for herself.

Narrative Form and the Reader's Experience of Fear

Technique matters a great deal in how psychological horror works. Jackson's controlled perspective keeps readers close to a character's interpretations while small contradictions pile up. The prose can stay calm while the events disturb, which opens a gap between restrained style and emotional intensity. Because of that restraint, readers cannot treat overstated description as a signal of danger. Ordinary details turn unsettling through repetition, arrangement and context.

Why Fear Becomes Home

The phrase "fear becomes home" can be read as describing a set of connected processes. First, fear becomes habit. Characters arrange daily life around a threat, whether it is a haunted building, hostile neighbours, a family secret or a concealed history. Repeated defensive acts make the frightening environment familiar. Second, fear becomes identity. Characters define themselves through the struggle to stay safe, to protect a private world, or to keep painful knowledge from returning.

Conclusion

Jackson and Straub show that psychological horror gets its force when fear is lodged in the places and relationships that promise safety. In *The Haunting of Hill House*, Eleanor's longing for recognition makes a threatening house look as if it could give her the home she has never had. In *We Have Always Lived in the Castle*, the Blackwood home shields its occupants from a hostile community while keeping them isolated and dependent on a closed domestic world.

Kristeva's theory of abjection accounts for the horror that appears when the boundaries between self and other, home and outside, or past and present collapse. Read together, they show that the Gothic house is more than a building. Jackson's particular contribution is her treatment of the quiet violence of domesticity and social conformity. Her horror grows out of the everyday structures through which people are judged, confined or denied recognition.

Straub widens haunting into a collective process that unfolds over time, and links individual fear to shared secrets and unresolved history. Both challenge the idea that danger can always be placed outside ordinary life.

When fear becomes home, safety and danger stop being opposites. A character may be most frightened where she feels most attached, and most isolated where she believes herself most protected. In both writers the wish for home can be exploited by supernatural forces, by oppressive social systems and by the mind's own defensive habits. Their Gothic fiction offers no easy remedy, because recognition can hurt and escape may cost the familiar self.

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