



“A Comparative Study of Philanthropic Practices in Medieval, Colonial, and Contemporary India”

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Possible Research Question:

How have the motivations, forms, and actors of philanthropy evolved from medieval India to the present?

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Abstract

The importance of this study lies in understanding the concept and transformative actions of philanthropy practice across the medieval, colonial, and modern periods of India. The study has approached comparative analysis to uncover the purpose, motivation, actors, and institutions of different periods. Historical institutionalism and path dependency led to examining how the socio-political context, religious tradition, and economy have changed the culture of giving. In medieval times, giving practice was associated with religious responsibility, which led to a spiritual path, such as a community kitchen under a Gurudwara, as well as Utsarg, Dana, and Zakat. Giving was also associated with the integration of authority. In the medieval period, charity and volunteering were practiced by rulers, affluent families, and saints. The colonial period was an era of imperial governance, and the structure of philanthropy was re-established and transformed from a religious tradition to one focused on social reform. Social reform was a new structure of philanthropy, led by social reformers, nationalists, and Christian missionaries, who practiced philanthropy to promote social equality, education for the marginalized, and women's rights, as well as health awareness. Philanthropy actions in the contemporary period have evolved into a formal structure, become professional with the motive of sustainability in social development, with quantifiable results, and focus on accountability and transparency. The modern actors include CSR, NGO initiatives, diaspora, and digital crowdfunding practice philanthropy in a systematic approach. This paper identifies the core objectives of the continuity of the concept of philanthropy, such as giving,

welfare, health, and education, and breaks in the structure of philanthropy that switched from faith-based patronage to planned and formal giving. The conclusion of the study reflects the comprehensive change in society, authority, and technology, and it also finds that durability in philanthropy over time has advanced human well-being.

I. Introduction

1.1 Define philanthropy and explain its relevance.

The practice of philanthropy has been going on for centuries. Philanthropy has given identity to every ancient civilization by strengthening its foundation. A philanthropic act not only earns virtue by giving but also plays a vital role in building a nation by inducing a deep sense that awakens profound awareness of responsibility and compassion towards others. The word itself means “to love human beings,” which is derived from the Ancient Greek. The concept of philanthropy has been defined by many scholars and authors, though it remains unsettled and unattained (Sulek 2010). Philanthropy provides financial support, resources, or volunteer services, which help to promote the well-being and welfare of human beings. Although the act of philanthropy is different from the act of charity, it is not just about providing immediate relief, but it also focuses on the root cause of problems in society and initiates social development. Philanthropy is a private offering for public welfare, by individuals, religious groups, businesses, and foundations (Barman 2017).

Many Sociologists have debated traditional theories of donation, charity, gift-giving, and philanthropy in a contemporary scenario. They argued that philanthropy encompasses a broader



landscape and that donation, charity, and gift-giving are its foundational elements. The concept of gift-giving involves exchanging gifts among family and friends, whereas the concept of charity involves people giving without expecting anything in return. Sociologists argue that these concepts are anachronistic in the present period, and people need to look beyond them (Cheal 1988, Halfpenny 1999). According to the 2014 World Giving Index, India ranked 106th among 145 nations, and in 2024 India ranked 26th among 142 countries (Charity Aid Foundation 2014 & 2024). This difference in the ranking of India within ten years is a remarkable climb; this transformation explains the changing ecosystem of philanthropy in India. This transformation is not just presented in global rankings but is also supported by various scholars and studies that emphasize the cultural, economic, and political sectors. According to FY2023, India witnessed a 10% increase, reaching ₹ 1.2 lakh crore (approx. \$ 15 billion) through private philanthropy. The ultra-high net worth of some individual foundations, such as the Azim Premji Foundation and Shiv Nadar Foundation, was notably contributed by raising over ₹1000 crore by APF and ₹700 crore by Shiv Nadar Foundation. Following 2013, the growth of expenditure of CSR increased remarkably; by FY2023, CSR expenditure was estimated at ₹28,000 crore (approx. \$326 million). The partnership between the private charitable foundations and the government elevated philanthropic activity to a new dimension. Tata Trust partnered with the government of India and local governments to initiate in establishment of cancer specialist hospitals and screening clinics for last-stage patients, ensuring quality care (Katdare, 2022).

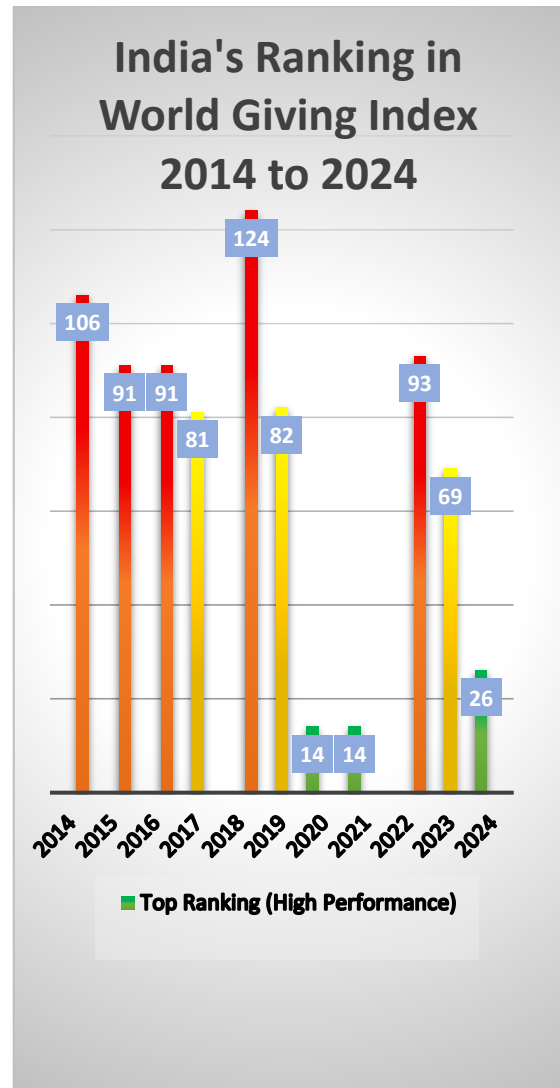


Chart 1: Source from Charity Aid Foundation

Philanthropy can be practiced through social service, donation, and performing voluntary service. This act is valuable; it encourages the advancement of society and brings morality to people. It is an inexorable practice that has transformed its role from religious obligation to social reform to social investment, but it still has the same fundamental purpose: to promote the well-being of humans. Globally, philanthropy is important for addressing social injustice, promoting civic engagement, and helping communities. The importance of philanthropy has been underlined by both conventional wisdom and recent studies, especially in light of our increasingly interconnected and globalised world. The willingness of individuals who believe that their main duty is to stay active in their community and that they should challenge the system



if they witness injustice has always been necessary for social progress. The significance of social philanthropy was emphasised by a well-known early philanthropist. Effective philanthropy is a social understanding of mutual growth rather than merely giving. Philanthropy is a new act that bridges the gap between the privileged and the underprivileged and can foster social awareness and democratic engagement (Addams, 1893).

In the 21st century, the role of philanthropy has been transformed. Today, the notion of philanthropy emphasizes on clear mission and goals, and the practice advocates for locals. The act defined the objectives between NGOs and donors (philanthropists), resulting in solid partnerships. The change from “giving with heart” to “giving with mind” switches the NGO's structure into professionalization, constantly working to emphasize accountability to donors (Mittenthal 2002). In the present scenario, philanthropy functions differently; to strengthen individual and institutional participation in philanthropy, the non-profit sector must have a solid network, norms, and trust to obtain social capital. Social capital results in good civic outcomes that strengthen the community and the participation of people (Brown and Ferris, 2004). Philanthropy fosters mass public participation in solving problems, whether through charity, volunteerism, social service, or community organizing. Engaging citizens of all nations in shaping the global responses to urgent global challenges is a central theme of today's philanthropic movement. Digital platforms and international networks have made it easier for people to come forward to support causes that transcend community and national boundaries. Philanthropy has also faced criticism due to major issues such as transparency, the dominance of donors, and the possibility that democratic governance may be eclipsed by philanthropic objectives, particularly large-scale foundations exert influence on public policy, and civic society (Streeten, 1997; Fowler, 2002; and Bromideh, 2011). But with modesty and accountability, philanthropy can enhance public institutions instead of replacing them. In a recent year, Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy developed a Global Philanthropy Tracker report (2023), which provided empirical data. The 2023 edition of GPT is an important channel that helps to understand the scope of philanthropy outflow contributed (USD 70 billion), cross-border remains a vital part of global development, parallel to official development assistance contributed (USD 180 billion), private capital investment, and remittances contributed

(USD 590 billion). GPT (2023) presented the data of contributions by individuals, institutions, agencies, and corporations of 47 countries in the year 2020. The data illustrate the dynamic flow of money across borders as a quick response to urgent crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Philanthropy teaches moral values, and this idea focuses on healing differences, uplifting marginalized, underprivileged communities, and encouraging democratic life. Philanthropy is a continuous, well-built pillar for social progress.

1.2 Briefly justify the comparative approach.

The comparative approach in this context facilitates a diachronic understanding of philanthropic action. The comparative method examines the evolution of philanthropy in three significant generations of Indian history: “Medieval”, “Colonial”, and “Contemporary” India. This framework assists in analyzing the historical study of philanthropy and how it transformed its motivation, values, and institutional mechanisms in response to shaping socio-political, cultural norms, and economic structure (Steinmo et al. 1992). The comparative analysis helps to understand the study of the philanthropic form of adaptation over time, changing from religious ideologies to governance systems and economic arrangements. This method is also connected with the concept of historical institutionalism, which implies that present-day systems like NGOs' funding structure, which is deeply rooted in historical decisions, practices, and institutions fabricate the future outcomes. This idea is known as Path Dependency (Anheier et al. 2006 & Boli et al. 1999).

The motivation for this research paper stems from my ongoing PhD course, where philanthropy appears to be a key factor that shapes the organisational structure, donors' expectations, and demands credibility. This raised an important inquiry: how are civic organizations so much dependent on philanthropy? And how philanthropy acquires so much power? This research paper will examine these foundations through a comparative lens, highlighting both centuries-old traditions (religious giving) and modern developments (the impact of transnational donors). However, the integration of theoretical and practical contributions can help in understanding how philanthropic cultural growth over time has influenced modern development and assist in developing frameworks.



II. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This research paper aims to study the comparative philanthropic practice of three different periods of India. This chapter will provide an outline of the methodological framework that is designed to conduct a comparative historical and contemporary analysis of the Philanthropy Act. This research will explore how the changes in the act of philanthropy inspired the patrons and the structure of the religious and socio-political context evolved. This paper depends on the qualitative and interpretive research methodology and uses theoretical context, analysing documents, and utilizing historical-comparative analysis.

2.2 Research Design

The design of the research aims to explore the changes in the process of giving culture and social system, which is why a historical-comparative and qualitative design is utilized to investigate the differences in the practice of philanthropy across three distinct periods of Indian history. To unveil the evolution of the role of people, organisational structure, and the giving culture across the medieval, colonial, and contemporary periods, the study needs to be exploratory and interpretative, aiming to expose the purpose, mechanism, and historical continuity and breaks in the act of philanthropy.

2.3 Comparative Historical Approach

The comparative historical approach is used to analyze charitable practices from informal beginnings to systematic changes over time. This method helps identify how philanthropic activities have been shaped by the development of mechanisms and institutions within the socio-political context of specific periods in India's history. The three main findings of this method are: first, to examine the continuity and breaks in philanthropy across the medieval, colonial, and contemporary periods; second, to identify the key influencers and how they affected the structure and culture of philanthropy during their times; and third, to investigate the role of organizations and foundations, such as NGOs, CSR initiatives, trusts, temples, mosques, and missions, in shaping the giving culture.

2.4 Theoretical framework

The analysis is under the theoretical framework that is linked with path dependency (Pierson, 2000) and historical institutionalism (Steinmo, 2008; Thelen, 2002). Larger arrangements form philanthropic structure, and historical institutionalism allows us to examine how these

broader arrangements, like institutional establishment, different religious traditions, and the functions of the government of separate periods, influence the development of philanthropy work. Whereas, in the path dependency through philanthropic practices in the past, it enables us to analyze the form and experience of the philanthropy act in the contemporary period.

2.5 The Source of Data Collection

The data is collected through two different sources: primary and secondary. Institutional documents, government records, like archival material, and religious historical books fall under the category of primary data. Academic texts, like a thesis, articles, journals, authoritative verified digital databases, and also confined reports of philanthropic institutions. The method of obtaining the data is through document analysis, which is also a qualitative research method.

2.6 Strategy for Data Analysis

The procedure to analyse data is strategized into three levels. In the first level, chronologically, data has been categorized into the medieval, colonial, and contemporary periods are three phases of Indian history to be focused. In the second level, the data of each period is expressed under the themes like the role of people and government, types of giving and volunteering, organizational structure, and motivation. The third level is strategized by a comparative method, and the investigation of all three periods is expounded upon through the lens of comparison to highlight the continuity and breaks in the practice of philanthropy over time.

2.7 Ethical Considerations and Limitations in the Study

All the data have been collected from authentic, verified sources, and the following sources are acknowledged by the standards of academic ethics. Documents, an authentic digital database, and thematic reports are cited to keep transparency, and the cultural interpretation has been handled with sensitivity and awareness. No human participation is involved.

The study's limitation involves the restriction of data from the early medieval period and data from certain religious communities. Due to the vast history, regional divergence has not been fully covered for all three periods. As primary data, human interviews are not included, which may affect contemporary analysis.



2.8 Summary

This chapter clarifies the approach in qualitative and comparative methods applied for this study, based on historical institutionalism and path dependency. By using the text as primary source data and journals, articles, and online databases as secondary source data, the research aims to establish a detailed and refined account of the development activities of philanthropy in India.

III. Philanthropy in Medieval India

3.1 Religious giving (e.g., Dana, Utsarg, Zakat, church endowments).

India witnessed a drastic change in the medieval period, particularly in religious, cultural, and community life. Still, the major shift was due to political and social transformation with the Islamic invasion, and with the growth of new institutions. Early medieval period Buddhists, Jains, and Hindus were all engaged in philanthropy following their religious tradition. Charity (Daan), and dedication or sacrifice (Utsarg) were considered the main forms of philanthropy act by Hindus. In the Buddhist and Jain traditions, nonviolence was practiced, and compassionate giving was highly valued. Hindu society in the medieval period believed that philanthropy practice was interlaced with two deep duties, "Dana" and "Utsarg" (Agarwal, 2010). The purpose of "dana" in Hinduism is to gain spiritual benefit, help detachment, and reduce ego. Dana is the oldest fundamental idea of Hindu dharmic life. Dana is classified in various intensions of giving, and some popular and unpopular dana are "Sattvik", "Rajasic", and "Tamasic". Sattvik is the pure intention form of dana, provided to the deserving without any reward or benefit in return, and should be offered at the proper timing. Rajasic dana is ego and pride intention of giving unwillingly and in a hesitant way, and with the desire of personal reward or to gain fame in return. Tamasic dana was done with a negative and misguided intention, with no proper timing, and a casual approach of giving without knowing whether deserving or undeserving (Bhagavad Gita: 17.20-22). Hindu society in the medieval period institutionalized the dana by donating to temples, feeding the poor, which is called "anna dana", and donating land for religious purposes. Royal patronage established rest houses (dharamshala), feeding halls (satras), and water tanks for the public. The influence of Buddhism declined during medieval India; however, monastic tradition continued to influence in some regions of India during the medieval period. Monasteries (viharas) continued the earlier Buddhist concept of dana-paramita (the perfection of giving), a traditional providing of food, education, and shelter

to the needy and pilgrims. Philanthropic work was a virtue in Buddhism that laid direction towards duty (dharma) by the construction of tanks and rest houses for the public, and supporting the Sangha (Gombrich, 2006).

Jainism is one of the Indian origin religions that is known for its adherence to non-violence (ahimsa), and even Jainism values dana as a highly philanthropic act. Tattvarthasutra is a Jain text that teaches to do charitable activities, which can lead to the purification of the soul and guide one towards the spiritual path. In medieval India, many Jain merchants initiated in promoting education, provided shelters to animals, and constructed Jain temples and wells for the public. Jain merchants, especially from Gujarat and Rajasthan, came forward, and their acts of giving made them philanthropists not just for a religious compulsion but also as a marker of community status (Dundas, 2003). A ruler, Raya Raghunatha Nayaka of the Thanjavur Nayaka dynasty, was not widely known, but as a Jain patron, he funded to building of Jain temples, "Basadi", shelters for animals, educational institutions, and encouraged religious pluralism and non-violence. Raya Raghunatha believed in religious synthesis and encouraged Hindu kinship to blend with multi-religions (Narayanan, 1994 & Cort, 2001). These wealthy Jain families were involved in religious and social work. They encouraged the teaching of ahimsa and purification of karma as religious teaching. They were also involved in enhancing the Jain community by funding rest houses, temples, food distribution, and stepwells (Dundas, 2002).

Another important religion with Indian roots is Sikhism, which was established in the Punjab region in the late medieval era by Guru Nanak between the 15th and 16th centuries. Guru Nanak lived between 1469 and 1539. Sikhism's religious teachings emphasize equality, service (Seva), and sharing (vand chhakna), all of which support the altruistic morals of Sikhs. The community kitchen (Langer), which served vegetarian food from Gurudwaras (Sikh places of worship) to people of all castes and religions, was one of the most well-known services started by Guru Nanak and later institutionalised by Guru Angad and Guru Amar Das. A communal kitchen serves as a symbol of equality, communal responsibility, and a link between spiritual humility and Sikhism. Another important philanthropic activity that is, Sikhs were urged to donate ten percent of their earnings for religious and community causes, and these funds were used as aid for education and shelter to the underprivileged, and it was also used for defence needs during persecution



in medieval times. This practice is known as “Dasvandh” (Singh, 2004).

Islam was also widely practiced, and a new religion was introduced in India, much like Sikhism; however, it will not be regarded as an Indian religion. Early in the thirteenth century, Islam conquered India. Institutional philanthropy based on Quranic concepts like “Zakat”, “Sadaq”, and “Waqf” emerged throughout Islamic governance in India during the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and the Mughal Empire (1526-1857). Muslims were required to give a mandatory donation (Zakat), a certain percentage (2.5%) of their earnings to support the orphans, the impoverished, travellers, and anyone else in need. The role of Zakat is to redistribute income and bring social welfare. The purpose is to purify wealth and to bring social justice. Sadaqa is another giving practice, but this practice is encouraged beyond Zakat. The purpose of Sadaqa was to receive spiritual reward; it is a voluntary action that can be done at any time and in any amount. In India, a Waqf institution flourished during the medieval period under the Delhi Sultanate and continued in the Mughal Empire. A waqf institution is a permanent religious endowment in the law of Islam. It involves property donation that generates income, and it was used for educational, scholarship, salaries, etc., for the religious staff, providing economic security. The asset was kept for the benefit of the public, and the donors gave up ownership. The purpose of a Waqf institute is to sustain the property wealth independent of political change (Daly, 2001 & Adzkiya et. al, 2023). Moinuddin Chishti, founder and popularizer of the Sufi order, settled in Ajmer, India, around 1192, operating for spiritual and social work from a spiritual and charitable activities centre (Khanqah), Ajmer, India. Khanqahs were the spiritual centres where Sufi saints (Pir Baba) practiced spirituality (Zikr). Khanqahs also serve society by providing learning centres, hospitality, and welfare for all castes, religions, and creeds. Khanqahs offered meals, healing services, and shelter, creating a space for dialogue between Hindus-Muslims about the Bhakti-Sufi tradition. Nizamuddin Auliya is one of the famous Khanqahs in Delhi that feeds thousands of people daily, and welcomes people from all walks of life (Rizvi, 1978 & Ernst, 2017).

3.2 Rulers’ donations, community kitchens, temple patronage.

In medieval India, charity was a crucial aspect of administration, authority, and leadership, as well as a religious, ethical, and moral obligation, and a personal virtue. Rulers from diverse dynasties have actively participated in philanthropic endeavours to

justify their rule, advance welfare, and maintain religious tolerance. These deeds of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, and Islamic often transcended religious responsibilities and were essential to public policy, administration, and cultural diplomacy. Facilities like building temples, rest houses, hospitals, water tanks, educational institutes (gurukuls, madrasas, libraries, etc.) were all funded by monarchs and regional rulers. They also institutionalised public welfare through interest-free loans to farmers and craftspeople, endowments to religious institutions, pensions for the elderly, widows' stipends, and charitable kitchens (langars). Along with upholding moral and spiritual commitments, these programs addressed pragmatic issues like famine relief, social justice, and intercommunal integration.

In order to maintain religious institutions, royal philanthropy was essential; this custom advanced public welfare and reinforced the link between political authority and moral obligation. An understanding of how medieval Indian rulers used philanthropy as a means of bringing social welfare and sociopolitical issues together was gained by evaluating these works.

3.2.1 Hindu Rulers

The Chola dynasty, one of the greatest Hindu monarchs of the Middle Ages, donated vast tracts of land for religious purposes as well as for the poor to eat and sleep on (Stein 1980). A well-known Hindu emperor of South India, Krishnadevaraya, ruled the Vijayanagar Empire from 1509 to 1529. Tirupati and Srisailem are among the more than a hundred temples he established. The King was well known for funding the construction of pilgrimage feedings, irrigation tanks, and rest houses. King also encouraged religious tolerance and promoted Vaishnavism, Shaktism, and Shaivism (Stein, 1990 & Eaton, 2019). Another Hindu king who battled alongside the Mughal army to protect local autonomy and religious establishments. She maintained temples, built a charity kitchen, and built public tanks. She ruled the tribal kingdom as a Hindu queen.

3.2.2 Buddhist Ruler

One of the Ladakhi Kings of the Western Himalayas, King Sengge Namgyal (1616-1642), was a Buddhist. By granting land grants to monasteries, he maintains a religious connection with Tibet, and this king has preserved the well-being of Buddhists. King promoted Buddhism by constructing hospitals, funding a public kitchen for pilgrims, and establishing Buddhist monasteries like Hanle monastery, Tsemo Gompa, and Hemis monastery (Rizvi, 1999).



3.2.3 Jain Rulers and Wealthy Families

Raya Raghunatha Nayaka, a Thanjavur Nayaka dynasty ruler, is not well known. Raya Raghunatha, a Jain patron, funded the construction of Jain temples, animal shelters (Panjarapoles), and educational institutions, alongside promoted religious pluralism and non-violence. He promoted religious synthesis during his reign by combining Hindu kinship with multi-religious patronage (Narayanan, 1994 & Cort, 2001). Some wealthy Jain families, who worked as merchants, promoted the teachings of ahimsa and karma purification, as well as engaging in numerous charitable endeavors. By providing funds for stepwells, temples, food distribution, and rest houses, these affluent families also contributed to the improvement of the Jain community (Dundas, 2002).

3.2.4 Sikh Gurus

The third Sikh guru, Guru Amar Das (1479–1574), institutionalised the langar system during his lifetime. During his time, Gurdwara Gondwal Sahib was constructed and developed into a significant spiritual hub. To serve both pilgrims and residents, the 84-well step, known as the Baoli Sahib, was also built. Additionally, Guru Amar Das gave travellers and the underprivileged free lodging and care. Since he opposed the purdah system and the sati paratha, Guru Amar Das supported women's empowerment. He also urged women to lead religious lives and supported widows' remarriage (McLeod, 1990).

3.2.5 Islamic Rulers

The most influential ruler of the Delhi Sultanate was Firoz Shah Tughlaq, who as per court records, built 100-plus hospitals, 30 colleges, 50 dams, and 40 mosques. He created numerous waqf properties for healthcare, education, and almsgiving. Firoz Shah promoted pensions for the elderly and gave stipends to widows, orphans, and people with disabilities. Additionally, Firoz Shah provided interest-free loans to farmers and craftspeople (Eaton, 2006 & Nizami, 2002). Another well-known and significant Badshah of the Mughal Empire is Akbar. Despite being an Islamist, Akbar made donations to Christian missions, Hindu temples, Jain monasteries, and Sufi dargahs. Akbar was also known as Akbar the Great because he abolished the pilgrimage tax, the tax on non-Muslims (Jaziya), and other religious taxes, promoting religious equality and interfaith welfare. Akbar established free kitchens in Agra and Fatehpur Sikri, influenced by the Sufi and Sikh models of Langar. During times of famine, Akbar would arrange for the free distribution of grain, regulate the cost of necessities, and forgive debt. In addition to

promoting education and constructing establishments like madrasas, libraries, and translation bureaus that made Hindu, Jain, and Persian classical texts easily accessible, Akbar also created a scholarly pension for Brahmin scholars of all faiths. Road and irrigation networks were upgraded (Chandra, 2007 & Richards, 1993).

IV. Philanthropy in the Colonial Period

4.1 Role of missionaries and reformers (e.g., Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Christian missions).

The act of philanthropy holds significant importance in Indian culture. It is believed that when one's seven needs are fulfilled, then one should donate to the welfare of others, for the welfare of society, and sacrifice and serve everyone who is in need. The growth in voluntary organizations was seen during British India, particularly in education and social welfare, which gained high importance during this era. Social workers and reformers like Gandhi, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan, Tagore, and many more focused on education for women. Christian missionaries also came forward and engaged in education and medical services, for instance, about 400 to 500 girls got instructions in schools under the American Missionary Society; they also multiplied school operations in 1829, missionaries of Scottish Church, their efforts to educate the Hindu girls of high class, and the attempts were made in Madras in 1841, the cause of leprosy elimination was taken up by missionaries in the colonial period (Huizinga, 1909).

It is equally important to explore individuals and organizations that actively contributed to philanthropic efforts to address the nation's urgent social, educational, and health challenges. During colonial India, multiple nationalist leaders, regional reformers, and Christian missionaries were identified as engaged in philanthropic ventures as methods of social reform, empowerment, and resistance rather than just as charitable endeavours. Their efforts were motivated by several objectives: Some aimed to establish a different type of civil society, some desired to change centuries-old traditions and customs, and some wanted to improve the lives of underprivileged groups by providing them with healthcare and education, and supporting them socially. The following section will underscore the philanthropic roles of a few Indian nationalists, social reformers, and Christian missionaries, whose efforts profoundly changed the trajectory of Indian history.

4.1.1 Indian Reformers and Nationalists

Pandita Ramabai raised her voice to empower women in colonial India. She was trained



in Sanskrit and Theology, and established Sharada Sadan in 1889 and Mukti Mission in 1898 for girls who suffered from child widowhood and poverty. These organisations offered shelter, formal education, and vocational training, helping them to become self-sustaining with farms and dairies. She also raised international funds for Mukti Mission operations during her travels in England and America, 1883-1891 (Tiwari, 2022).

Swami Vivekananda, one of the most prominent reformers, fused spiritually with social activism and was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission in 1897. Swami created the organisational foundation for schools, hospitals, orphanages, and relief centres across India. He attended the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 to raise funds for the impoverished in India, and with the same motive, later he went on a western tour. The mission introduced “seva” (service), a religious obligation. The mission radically changed the Indian philanthropy from temple-centred generosity to organized social welfare (Kumar, 2017).

Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, who stood in the 19th century as a Muslim social reformer, founded the Scientific Society in 1864 in Ghazipur. He worked significantly for Indian Muslims, making them accessible to modern knowledge, translating Western scientific texts into Hindi and Urdu. He was the co-founder of the Mohammedan Anglo-Oriental College in 1875, which later evolved into Aligarh Muslim University. His goal was to integrate Western education with Islamic values. Sir Syed tried to harmonize tradition with modernity and technology, since he believed that education is the only key to uplifting the community. His initiatives were funded by Muslim leaders and some British patronage; it demonstrated a strategic blending of colonial and native assets (Hasan 2022).

B.R. Ambedkar was both a social reformer and a constitutional nationalist. He founded the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha in 1924; his vision encompassed social justice, the abolition of the caste system, and promoting education and welfare for Dalits. Ambedkar supported educational programs and established schools for underserved populations (Prasad, 2021). Ambedkar used the money he earned from scholarships from Columbia in 1913-15 and LSE in 1916-17. Ambedkar believed in a democratic philosophy that advocates for economic empowerment and education as vital for social advancement and dignity, which formed the foundation of his philanthropy (Chakrabarty, 2016).

4.1.2 Christian Missionaries

William Carey was known as the father of modern missions in India. By 1810, Carey had established a network of over 100 elementary schools and influenced social reformers of his time. He was against the practice of sati and female infanticide. His efforts served a key role in the Bengal Sati Regulation (1829). He raised international funds of over £3,000 in Britain and \$10,000 in the United States for Serampore’s printing and educational activities (Smith, 2011).

Alexander Duff, a Scottish missionary educator in Calcutta, founded the General Assembly’s Institution (later known as Scottish Church College) in 1830. Duff instigated the British government to establish the University of Calcutta in 1857, and was motivated to believe that Indian society could be elevated by Western education and Christian values. The Church of Scotland and the missionary society in Britain supported the work of Duff by backing him financially and with ideological thought (Emmott, 1965).

Dr. Ida Sophia Scudder was a medical missionary born into an American missionary family in Tamil Nadu, associated with the Reformed Church in America. Her vision was to open women’s medical education and maternal healthcare. Scudder founded Christian Medical College in Vellore (1900). She provided gender-sensitive treatment to plague and famine victims (Rajan et. al, 2024).

4.2 Emergence of educational trusts, caste/community-based giving.

Colonial India's philanthropic practice differed greatly in its forms, actors, motivations, and structure. European liberalism, Christian missionary ethics, and Indian reformist-nationalist ideas all had an impact on India's colonial era (1757–1947) (Chatterjee, 2020; Sarkar, 1989). India's social structure was altered by British colonial control, which brought about industrialisation, modern education, and a colonial economy (Bayly, 1987). In colonial India, philanthropic endeavours were driven by a confluence of nationalist, reformist, humanitarian, and religious motivations. Reformers like Vidyasagar and Phule, nationalists like Gandhi and Tagore, women activists like Padita Ramabai, and industrialists like Christian missionaries, industrialists like Tata, women's activists like Padita Ramabai, nationalists like Gandhi and Tagore, reformers like Vidyasagar and Phule, and others (Forbes 1996).

During India's colonial era, caste and community-based trusts for education and charitable giving were established. India saw the



institutionalisation of philanthropy during the colonial era, which served as justification for reshaping native tendencies and promoting private initiative in the field of education. To improve and support their community through literacy, prominent and small but wealthy communities, like the Banias, Parsis, and Kayasthas, started to establish educational and charitable trusts, offer scholarships, and construct schools. Indian students have the opportunity to study overseas thanks to the J. N. Tata Endowment (1892). The construction of technical schools in the Bombay Presidency was greatly aided by trusts such as the Bai Motlibai and Kharshedji Tata (Green, 2011). Within the confines of caste identity, for example, mutt-based endowments were established, and Sanskrit was taught to upper-caste Brahmins and Vellalars. To combat caste exclusion in education, a reformist lower-caste leader like Jyotiba Phule offered an alternative educational system. By enacting the Religious and Charitable Endowment Act of 1863 and the Indian Trust Act of 1882, the British government kept a safe distance, frequently acknowledged private initiatives, and supported them through legal means. These frameworks were then given official status (Forbes & Forbes, 1999; Haynes, 1987). The colonial era established the foundation for contemporary Indian education and changed the structure of philanthropy from an informal, religiously framed practice in Dana and Utsarg to a formal, contemporary, and legally recognised philanthropy. By creating the framework for contemporary NGOs and civil society organisations like the Tata Trust, the Theosophical Society, Servants of Indian Society, Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and Prarthana Samaj, colonial philanthropy carried on its legacy (Heimsath, 2015).

V. Philanthropy in Contemporary India

A paradigm shift in philanthropy is taking place in modern-day India. Modern India's charitable endeavours are no longer limited to customary religious donations or familial foundations; rather, they have developed into more planned, strategic, and diverse organisations. Economic growth, corporate revolution, civil society activism, and digital transformation have all had a significant impact on the way Indians give and the reasons they give. Digital platforms, corporate social responsibility (CSR), NGO-led projects, and the expanding influence of the Indian diaspora are the main forces driving this change.

5.1 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

The concept of Corporate Social Responsibility dates back to the Industrial

Revolution. A well-known example is Robert Owen, a businessman, philanthropist, and social reformer, who established a town with schools and hospitals for his industrial workers (Rogers, 2018). Today, CSR has become a major pillar of institutional philanthropy in India. CSR funding key focuses on the areas of education, health, rural development, and environmental sustainability (KPMG, 2022). Indian companies increased their CSR expenditures from ₹24,865 crore in fiscal year 2020-21 to ₹25,933 crore in the fiscal year 2021-22 (National CSR Portal, 2023). Leading companies, such as TATA, Infosys, and Reliance, strategically utilize their CSR funds to promote sustainable social interventions. (Sundar, 2013; Confederation of Indian Industry [CII], 2021).

5.2 NGO-led initiatives, individual giving platforms (e.g., GiveIndia).

A 2020 report of the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability stated that India has motivated over 3.1 million NGOs to establish (CBGA, 2020). NGO's role is greatly identified to bridge the implementation gap in social programs, to promote policy reforms, and to mobilize local communities. These non-governmental organizations encompass major foundations with a national and global reach to grassroots organizations serving rural areas. (Chandhoke, 2007; PRIA, 2015). NGOs like Goonj, Akshaya Patra, and Pratham are prime examples of philanthropic impact and exceptional social innovation. Many NGOs work with a corporation's CSR department to implement field-level projects and establish a model for cooperative development that benefits both parties (Mercea & Stoica, 2007; Dosbayeva, 2010).

With more than half of Indian donors saying they are likely to give more through online platforms, individual giving has changed. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, digital giving gained popularity (Charities Aid Foundation India, 2022). One emerging facet of Indian philanthropy is the use of digital platforms by individual donors to directly contribute to causes close to their hearts. Transparency, accountability, and the simplification of donations have been made possible by digital giving channels in India, including GiveIndia, Milaap, Ketto, and ImpactGuru. One of India's largest donation platforms, GiveIndia, raised 300 crores to support causes like disaster relief, healthcare, and education, according to an FY 2021–22 report (GiveIndia Annual Report, 2022). In addition to helping middle-class individuals make consistent contributions to humanitarian causes, these digital giving platforms have had a significant



impact and grown the philanthropic foundation (Bain & Company, 2021).

5.3 Role of diaspora and digital giving. Indian diaspora means Indians who have spread to other parts of the world from their original homeland. With over 35 million individuals worldwide, the Indian diaspora plays an important role in India's philanthropic ecosystem (MEA, 2025). Remittances to India reached \$129 billion, 2024 (World Bank, 2024), having a portion flowing towards community development and philanthropic donations. A strong sense of cultural identity and a feeling of belonging to one's ancestral home frequently form the foundation of diaspora philanthropy (Riddle et al., 2008). Institutions like the American Indian Foundation (AIF) and Philanthropic Alliance channel diaspora contributions into organised, impact-driven programs.

Technology has made it easier because it is possible to monitor activities and offer assistance from a distance. Overseas donations are now faster and more trustworthy due to crowdfunding websites, blockchain-based platforms, and a real-time reporting system (Avdoshin & Pesotskaya, 2020; Ayssa, 2023).

VI. Comparative Analysis

India has witnessed a remarkable and noteworthy transformation in cultural, financial, and religious philanthropic practices. It has evolved from several critical dimensions, with the evidence from the medieval to the contemporary period that involves actors, the motivation behind the donation, the continuity, and the intervals of goals across medieval, colonial, and contemporary India.

6.1 Changing Motivation:

The philanthropic act during medieval India was truly immersed in religious duty. The motivation behind giving is to earn spiritual merit. Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism had similar philosophies of giving as a way to spiritual promotion, and promote communal equality. Islam institutionalized Waqf and Zakat as religious duties that ensure community welfare and provide social justice. Hindus, at the same time, had a different tradition to serve the society, emphasizing Dana (Charity), and Utsarg (Sacrifice) to purify the soul, and to awaken spiritually and intellectually.

The colonial period marked a significant shift in philanthropic work; it was a time when the supremacy of kings had waned and India was under complete British control. It was the era of new motivation that led to the dawn of social reforms. In

colonial India, philanthropy was re-shaped as a mechanism for social reform, more than a religious expression. Reformers were regressively challenging old customs and traditions, and promoting gender and caste equality, women's education, and health. The goal of Christian missionaries was to uplift society and bring institutional changes by supporting health and education. There was a remarkable transition from spiritual safety to rational advancement.

Contemporary philanthropic work is purely driven by social investment. Platforms like CSR, macro-NGOs, and digital crowdfunding are goal-oriented and a planned form of philanthropy. The focus of funders is on quantifiable measurement and accountability; they work on rural development, health, education, and the sustainable environment.

6.2 Actors of the Three Eras:

In medieval India, giving was more about moral compassion. Kings, monarchs, and wealthy families were the actors who built water-tanks, temples, community kitchens, mosques, learning institutes, and hospitals, showing their devotion to religion and power. Krishnadevaraya and Akbar were the rulers in medieval India who used the method of philanthropy to emphasize the coexistence of multiple religions, and public welfare.

Indian social reformers and Christian missionaries were emerging actors of colonial India. Individual social reformers like Vivekananda, Pandita Ramabai, and William Carey were influential philanthropists who mobilized their networks to change centuries-old traditions and brought a reform in society. Additionally, community-based philanthropy was more actively organized.

Philanthropic actors of modern present time have elaborated their social welfare work to institutions and corporations. Modern philanthropic actors like Azim Premji Foundation, TATA Trust, and Shiv Nadar have contributed billions of sums of money for social causes and social development. Besides these foundations, there are digital crowdfunding platforms like GiveIndia, and the Indian diaspora has also been a large contributor in recent years, empowering global citizens.

6.3 Continuities and Breaks of Methods and Goals:

There is a single core goal that has been continued in all three eras: alleviating suffering and elevating human well-being. However, the methods have evolved from medieval to contemporary India. Work on the community kitchen, education, and health remained central causes of the timeline. However, the break in methods is equally important



as they have shifted from an unstructured to a structured system, and from religious and faith-based giving to professionalized philanthropy, such as the moral giving of kings, saints, and monks, now changed into NGO's support, CSR initiatives, and blockchain-tracked donation. Also, modern philanthropy is moving towards data-driven, transparency, accountability, and impact scaling. The break of eras has also shifted the beneficiaries from religious merit to community-based development for the marginalised, underprivileged, and needy population, with a systematic transformation.

6.4 Conclusion

This comparative study examines the progression of philanthropy practice that reveals the relationship among society, power, and civil duty from medieval to colonial and contemporary times in India. This reflects the transformation in moral values, power, and economic systems, and the engagement of people over time.

In medieval India, kings, wealthy families, saints, and monks were the key actors in delivering progress in public welfare, utilizing philanthropic functions through their religious and moral authority. Performing a philanthropic act leads to serving communal harmony and legitimizes political authority through religious practices like Dana, Utsarg, Zakat, and Langar. This practice made the spiritual life and rule integrated, resulting in public benefit, and was considered a divine and royal duty.

Philanthropy in the colonial period was more than a religious duty; it synthesized into a religio-political definition. With the rise of British rule, royal giving was declining, and individual reformers and Christian missionaries came forward to resist, reconstructing old social phenomena of inequality, and fighting against the injustice served by colonial power. In colonial times functions of philanthropy shifted from giving and constructing for religion to fighting for the rights of the suppressed and illiterate, challenging caste and gender discrimination, and patriarchal norms. This period brought consciousness to the Indian society. As the government became more bureaucratic, it took less interest in public welfare, while private and public organizations undertook voluntary initiatives.

The practice of philanthropy in the contemporary period differs from philanthropy in the medieval and colonial periods. It has shifted from being an informal to a formal function, shaped an organizational framework, corporate accountability, professional, and technological systems. Contemporary people are increasingly aware of social issues and have advanced tools to help solve

them. In this modern time, the government practices philanthropy and takes care of its actions by measuring them with their impact, and return on social investment. Many new organizations, funding agencies, and technologies, such as NGOs, digital crowdfunding, and CSR, have emerged to improve society by decentralizing social responsibility. It has also been observed that ever since the pandemic, businesses, citizens, communities, and diaspora have made a huge contribution when the government is less equipped to fulfill its social obligations.

This transition of philanthropy has revealed its concept: that it is not just about giving, but it is an unstoppable force that changes societal priorities according to different periods, people's participation, and ethical finance. The evolution of the practice of Indian philanthropy shifted from the king to democracy, from religion to equality, and from temples to technologies. Indian philanthropy continued its ethical giving tradition and social progress from one period to another.

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