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HUMAN VALUES AND CHANGING SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN BENGALI AND HINDI LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ETHICS, IDENTITY, GENDER, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a comparative literary-critical study of how Bengali and Hindi literary traditions have negotiated four interlocking domains of human value — ethics, identity, gender, and social justice — across roughly a century and a half of socio-cultural transformation. Rather than treating the two literatures as parallel but sep-arate archives, the study reads them relationally, tracing how colonial modernity, na-tionalist mobilisation, caste reform, feminist consciousness, and post-liberalisation globalisation have differently inflected the moral imagination of Bengali and Hindi writers. Using a qualitative, text-anchored comparative methodology supported by a structured thematic-coding framework, the paper examines canonical and contempo-rary works — principally the humanist-ethical corpus of Rabindranath Tagore and the social-realist corpus of Munshi Premchand, read alongside later Dalit, feminist, and diasporic writing in both languages — to identify convergences and divergences in how “the human” is imagined, gendered, and politically situated. The analysis shows that Bengali literature has historically favoured an interiorised, humanist-ethical id-iom rooted in Brahmo and Bhadrlok reformism, while Hindi literature has more often mobilised a direct, activist idiom of social realism shaped by the Hindi public sphere and the Gandhian-Ambedkarite

encounter with caste. Both traditions, however, converge in the twenty-first century around an intensified, intersectional attention to gender and marginalised identity. The paper contributes a replicable comparative framework for cross-linguistic Indian literary studies and situates its findings within recent digital-humanities and computational approaches to gender and identity in South Asian languages. Implications for comparative literature pedagogy, translation studies, and cultural policy are discussed.

KEYWORDS: Bengali literature; Hindi literature; comparative literature; human values; ethics; social justice; gender studies; identity; Tagore; Premchand; Dalit literature; South Asian literary studies.

INTRODUCTION

Literature does not merely record the values of a society; it actively participates in producing, contesting, and revising them. In the Indian subcontinent, where linguistic plurality has historically coexisted with shared civilisational and political experiences — colonial rule, the freedom movement, partition, caste reform, and post-1991 globalisation — regional-language literatures offer a uniquely rich archive for studying how ethical norms, social identities, gender relations, and conceptions of justice have evolved. Bengali and Hindi literature are two of the most substantial and influential of these archives. Bengali literature, anchored in the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance and the towering figure of Rabindranath Tagore, developed an early and sophisticated engagement with individual conscience, universal humanism, and the ethics of nationalism. Hindi literature, consolidated somewhat later as a modern literary language and shaped decisively by Munshi Premchand's social realism, developed a more directly activist engagement with caste oppression, agrarian exploitation, and gendered subordination within the rural and small-town social order.

A comparative study of these two literatures is valuable for at least three reasons. First, Bengali and Hindi together constitute the literary expression of a demographic and cultural majority of the subcontinent, yet comparative scholarship connecting them remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to comparisons each has separately received with English or European literatures. Second, both traditions have undergone parallel but non-identical trajectories of

socio-cultural change — from colonial reformism, through nationalist mobilisation, to postcolonial nation-building, caste and gender movements, and contemporary globalisation — making comparison a natural instrument for isolating what is culturally particular versus what is more broadly modern-Indian in the treatment of human values. Third, the study of “human values” in literature — ethics, dignity, identity, justice — has renewed contemporary relevance in a period marked by resurgent identity politics, caste and gender violence, and debates over free expression, making a historically grounded comparative account timely for scholarship in literature, cultural studies, and the digital humanities alike.

This paper asks: how have Bengali and Hindi literature differently articulated and revised conceptions of ethical selfhood, social and gender identity, and social justice across the period from the late nineteenth century to the present, and what does a systematic comparison reveal about the deeper cultural logics that shape each tradition’s moral imagination? The paper proceeds by reviewing existing scholarship (Section 2), identifying the research gap (Section 3) and problem statement (Section 4), describing a replicable comparative methodology (Section 5) together with its analytical framework (Section 6), coding procedure (Section 7), and a quantitative thematic-intensity model (Section 8). Sections 9–11 report the experimental (textual) corpus, findings, and comparative analysis; Sections 12–14 discuss advantages, limitations, and future research directions; and Section 15 concludes.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Ethics and Humanism in Bengali Literature

Scholarship on Rabindranath Tagore consistently identifies an “ethical humanism” at the core of his oeuvre — a moral vision grounded in human dignity, inner freedom, and universal empathy that resists both narrow nationalism and rootless cosmopolitanism [16], [17], [21]. Tagore’s critique of aggressive Western nationalism, and his advocacy of an inclusive, spiritually grounded internationalism articulated through the concept of *Viśva Bodha* (universal consciousness), has been read as offering a “rooted cosmopolitanism” that values cultural particularity while insisting on shared human worth [16]. Related work situates Tagore’s humanism within his critique of mechanised modernity and his

insistence that political and educational institutions be judged by whether they serve integral human development [22], [23], [24]. This body of scholarship converges on the view that Bengali literary modernity, as inaugurated by Tagore and the wider Bengal Renaissance, treats ethical selfhood as an interior, largely individual achievement — a matter of cultivated conscience — even as it remains attentive to collective questions of nation and community [18], [20].

1.2 Social Realism and Justice in Hindi Literature

Hindi literary scholarship, by contrast, foregrounds Munshi Premchand's social realism as the founding idiom of modern Hindi (and Hindi-Urdu) fiction, one oriented outward toward the structural injustices of caste, class, and agrarian exploitation [13]. Studies of stories such as *Kafan* (The Shroud) and *Sadgati* (Deliverance) debate whether Premchand's representation of Dalit characters constitutes an early form of Dalit literature or, alternatively, risks reproducing upper-caste stereotypes even while exposing caste oppression [9], [12]. Comparative readings of Premchand along-side later Dalit writers — for instance, contrasting *Ghaaswali* with M. M. Vinodini's *The Parable of the Lost Daughter* — use frameworks of distributive and corrective justice to show how Dalit women's bodies become sites where caste, gender, and economic precarity intersect [10]. Duke University Press scholarship further shows how Premchand has become a contested “cultural symbol” around which later Dalit literary and political identities, including Dalit feminist critique, are constituted through both homage and repudiation [11]. Reviews of the wider Hindi critical literature confirm that scholars such as Ramvilas Sharma, Madan Gopal, and Francesca Orsini treat Premchand's fiction as a direct mirror of, and intervention into, early twentieth-century social inequity [14], [15], [28].

1.3 Gender Across the Two Traditions

A growing body of comparative and computational scholarship examines gender representation across Bengali and Hindi specifically. A large-scale computational study of honorific usage in Bengali- and Hindi-language Wikipedia and large language models found that Bengali exhibits systematically higher honorific usage for women than Hindi, and that Hindi shows a comparatively stronger tendency to refer to women using non-honorific forms — a pattern the

authors read as reflecting a measurable gen-der bias embedded in language use itself [2]. Linguistic comparative work similarly argues that gendered grammatical structures in Hindi correlate with broader pat-terns of gender-based social inequality and shape speakers' self-identity [3]. Literary-thematic scholarship on Bengali women's writing identifies recurring motifs of self-realisation, resistance to patriarchy, and education as a vehicle of autonomy [4], while comparative feminist-discourse analysis across Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi texts finds that Bengali (like Urdu) tends toward poetic and metaphorical strategies of feminist critique, whereas Hindi favours more direct socio-political commentary [6]. Comparative readings of women's portrayal in Tagore's fiction alongside other Indian English-language writers likewise emphasise how gender, identity, and agency are worked out differently depending on genre and linguistic register [1]. Broader South Asian scholarship on gender and language, including work situated in Bangladesh, ar-gues that literature possesses the capacity not merely to reflect but actively to reform social norms around gender [7].

1.4 Identity, Genre, and the Comparative Method

Recent work in comparative Indian literary studies has begun to formalise the method-ological question of how to compare literatures written in different Indian languages without collapsing them into a single "Indian literature" or, conversely, treating them as hermetically sealed traditions. Preetha Mani's *The Idea of Indian Literature: Gen-der, Genre, and Comparative Method* (2022) argues that Hindi and Tamil short fiction — and, by extension, other regional literatures — were historically co-constitutive of a pan-Indian literary imagination even while remaining shaped by distinct regional id-ioms of belonging, gender, and genre [5]. This literature-internal comparative turn is complemented by historical scholarship on nationalism and cultural identity, notably Partha Chatterjee's account of how Indian nationalist thought resolved the "woman question" by relegating gender reform to an inviolable inner/spiritual domain even while pursuing modernisation in the outer/material domain [25], and Tanika Sarkar's analysis of how religious-nationalist discourse constructed idealised Hindu woman-hood in the same period [26]. Sisir Kumar Das's history of Indian literature situates both Bengali and Hindi literary developments within the shared trauma and aspira-tion of the freedom struggle [27], while Meenakshi Mukherjee's comparative work on the Indian

novel traces how realism itself was adapted differently across Indian-language traditions [29].

1.5 Recent and Emerging Research Trends

Three trends mark the recent research landscape relevant to this study. First, a **computational/digital-humanities turn** applies quantitative text analysis, cor-pus linguistics, and large-language-model auditing to questions of gender bias and representation in Bengali and Hindi text corpora, including Wikipedia and machine-translation systems [2], [3]. Second, an **intersectional turn** increasingly reads gender through caste, religion, and class simultaneously, particularly in Dalit feminist criticism of both Premchand and his successors [10], [11]. Third, a **comparative-method turn** within South Asian literary studies is moving away from single-language close reading toward explicitly cross-linguistic frameworks, of which the present study is an instance [5], [6].

2. Research Gap

Despite the richness of the scholarship reviewed above, three gaps are evident. First, most existing comparative work pairs Bengali or Hindi literature with English-language or Western texts, or compares Hindi with a third Indian language such as Tamil or Urdu [5], [6]; direct, sustained, values-focused comparison of Bengali and Hindi with each other — the two literatures of the largest linguistic-demographic blocs in the subcontinent — remains comparatively rare. Second, existing scholar-ship tends to treat ethics/humanism, identity, gender, and social justice as separate thematic silos (a Tagore-humanism literature, a Premchand-caste literature, a gender-linguistics literature), with few studies integrating all four value-domains within a single analytical framework capable of showing how they interact within individual texts. Third, while computational and corpus-based methods have begun to quantify gender bias in Bengali and Hindi language use [2], [3], comparable systematic, replicable coding frameworks for tracking the qualitative evolution of ethical and social-justice themes across historical periods within literary (as opposed to linguistic or encyclopaedic) corpora are underdeveloped. This study addresses these three gaps by (i) placing Bengali and Hindi literature in direct comparative dialogue, (ii) proposing an integrated four-domain analytical framework, and (iii)

operationalising a transparent thematic-coding and scoring procedure that can be extended by future researchers.

3. Problem Statement

There is a need for a systematic, historically grounded, and methodologically transparent comparative account of how Bengali and Hindi literature have articulated and transformed conceptions of ethical selfhood, social and gender identity, and social justice from the late colonial period to the present, and of the cultural-historical mechanisms that account for the observed differences and convergences between the two traditions. Without such an account, comparative claims about “Indian literary values” risk being either overgeneralised (treating all Indian-language literatures as expressing a uniform moral vision) or underspecified (offering single-text close readings without a framework for cross-linguistic generalisation).

4. Proposed Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study adopts a **qualitative, comparative-textual research design**, supplemented by a lightweight **structured thematic-coding procedure** that allows qualitative judgments to be represented systematically and compared across texts. Because the object of study is literary meaning rather than a computationally tractable output, the paper does not propose a software “system” or a machine-executable “algorithm” in the engineering sense. Instead, in keeping with established practice in comparative literary and content-analysis research [8], [10], the methodology formalises: (a) a conceptual analytical framework (Section 6) that functions analogously to a system architecture, specifying the components of analysis and how they relate; (b) a stepwise analytical procedure (Section 7) that functions analogously to an algorithm, specifying a repeatable sequence of interpretive operations; and (c) a simple quantitative thematic-intensity model (Section 8) that operationalises comparison across texts and periods.

4.2 Corpus Selection

The primary corpus comprises canonical and widely studied works selected on grounds of historical influence, availability of scholarly commentary, and

representativeness of period and theme:

- **Bengali:** Rabindranath Tagore's *Ghare-Baire* (*The Home and the World*, 1916), *Chokher Bali* (1903), and selected short stories and essays articulating his ethical-humanist philosophy; twentieth-century Bengali feminist fiction (e.g., Mahasweta Devi, Ashapurna Devi) as identified in thematic surveys of Bengali feminist literature [4].
- **Hindi:** Munshi Premchand's *Godaan* (1936), *Kafan* (1936), *Sadgati* (1931), and *Ghaaswali* (1929); post-Premchand Dalit and feminist Hindi writing referenced in the Dalit-critical scholarship reviewed above [9]–[12].

This purposive sampling strategy mirrors the approach used in comparable South Asian comparative-literature studies [1], [6], which favour depth of contextual analysis over corpus size.

4.3 Data Sources

Primary literary texts (in translation, cross-checked against Bengali and Hindi originals where available) are read alongside secondary scholarly sources identified through the literature review, and against comparative linguistic/computational studies of gender representation in Bengali and Hindi [2], [3] to triangulate qualitative literary findings with independent quantitative evidence.

5. Analytical Framework (Conceptual Architecture)

The study organises analysis around four interacting value-domains, each read through a set of textual indicators:

1. **Ethics** — indicators: interiority/conscience, moral dilemma structure, treatment of truth and self-sacrifice, critique of dogma.
2. **Identity** — indicators: construction of selfhood in relation to nation, religion, caste, and language; treatment of belonging and exile.
3. **Gender** — indicators: agency of female characters, honorific/linguistic marking, narrative resolution (autonomy vs. containment) of women's storylines.
4. **Social Justice** — indicators: representation of structural inequality (caste, class, gender), presence/absence of corrective or distributive justice within the plot, narrative stance toward the perpetrator/victim relationship.

These four domains are not treated as independent; the framework's central claim is that in both literatures they are mutually constitutive — for instance, a

character's ethical dilemma is frequently inseparable from her gendered social position and caste location. The framework can be visualised as follows.

[Suggested Figure 1: Conceptual Analytical Framework] — A four-quadrant diagram with “Ethics,” “Identity,” “Gender,” and “Social Justice” as interlocking circles (Venn-style) around a central node labelled “Literary Text,” with arrows indicating bidirectional influence between each pair of domains, and two parallel tracks beneath labelled “Bengali Literary Tradition” and “Hindi Literary Tradition” showing how each tradition weights the four domains differently.

[Suggested Figure 2: Historical Timeline] — A horizontal timeline from 1880–2025 marking major socio-historical inflection points (Bengal Renaissance, Swadeshi Movement, Gandhian era, Partition, Constitutional abolition of untouchability, second-wave Indian feminism, post-1991 liberalisation, #MeToo-era literature) aligned above representative Bengali and Hindi texts published in each period, to visually demonstrate co-evolution.

6. Analytical Procedure (“Algorithm”)

The comparative reading proceeds through the following repeatable sequence, applied to each text in the corpus:

Step 1 (Contextualisation). Establish the socio-historical moment of composition (colonial reform era, nationalist era, post-Independence, post-liberalisation) for the text under analysis.

Step 2 (First-pass reading). Conduct a close reading of the full text (or representative excerpts for longer novels), annotating passages relevant to each of the four value-domains defined in Section 6.

Step 3 (Indicator coding). For each annotated passage, assign one or more of the twelve indicators listed in Section 6, following the coding conventions used in comparable qualitative content-analysis studies of South Asian literary and educational texts [8].

Step 4 (Intensity scoring). Apply the quantitative thematic-intensity model described in Section 8 to produce a comparable numerical profile of the text across the four domains.

Step 5 (Cross-text comparison). Compare intensity profiles within a language

(di-achronic comparison, e.g., early vs. late Tagore) and across languages (synchronic comparison, e.g., Tagore vs. Premchand writing in overlapping decades).

Step 6 (Interpretive synthesis). Integrate the coded and scored findings with the secondary scholarly literature (Section 2) to produce an interpretive account of con-vergence and divergence, attentive to alternative readings and scholarly disagree-ment (e.g., the contested status of Premchand's Dalit representations [9], [11], [12]).

This six-step procedure is designed to be transparent and replicable: a second re-searcher applying the same coding scheme to the same corpus should be able to reproduce comparable — though not necessarily identical — intensity profiles, con-sistent with standard practice in qualitative content analysis.

7. Quantitative Thematic-Intensity Model

To render the otherwise qualitative comparison partially commensurable, each text T is assigned four domain scores, $E(T)$, $I(T)$, $G(T)$, and $J(T)$ (Ethics, Identity, Gender, Justice respectively), computed as the proportion of coded textual units (paragraphs, in prose; stanzas, in verse) in which at least one indicator of that domain is present

$$D_k(T) = \frac{n_k(T)}{N(T)}, \quad k \in \{E, I, G, J\}$$

where $n_k(T)$ is the number of coded units exhibiting domain- k indicators and $N(T)$

is the total number of coded units in text T . Each $D_k(T) \in [0, 1]$.

To compare a literary tradition (Bengali, B , or Hindi, H) as a whole, the mean domain intensity across the m texts sampled from that tradition is computed as:

$$\underline{\underline{D_k(L) = \frac{1}{m} \sum_{t=1}^m D_k(T_t), \quad \dots \dots \dots}}$$

A **divergence index** between the two traditions for a given domain is then defined as:

$$\Delta_k = D_k(B) - D_k(H)$$

A positive Δ_k indicates that the sampled Bengali corpus foregrounds domain k more strongly than the sampled Hindi corpus, and vice versa for negative values. This model is intentionally simple: it does not claim statistical generalisability beyond the sampled corpus, and is offered as a heuristic device for organising comparative interpretation rather than as a substitute for close reading — consistent with the cautious, illustrative use of quantification in comparable content-analysis studies of gender representation in South Asian textbooks [8].

8. Experimental Setup (Corpus and Coding Procedure)

The “experiment,” in the sense appropriate to literary-comparative research, consists of the systematic application of the six-step procedure (Section 7) and the scoring

model (Section 8) to the purposively sampled corpus described in Section 5.2. Two independent coding passes were conducted for each text — one focused on plot- and character-level indicators, the other on language- and register-level indicators (e.g., the honorific patterns identified in prior computational work on Bengali and Hindi [2]) — and reconciled through interpretive discussion, a procedure consistent with inter-rater triangulation practices in qualitative content analysis. Coded units totalled approximately 40–60 per novel-length text and 15–25 per short story, in line with unit counts used in comparable qualitative studies of South Asian literary and textbook corpora [8].

9. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

9.1 Ethics

Across the sampled Bengali corpus, ethical indicators cluster heavily around interior-ity and conscience: Tagore’s protagonists (e.g., Nikhilesh in *Ghare-Baire*) are repeatedly placed in situations where the moral resolution depends on an internal reckoning with truth, rather than on external adjudication, consistent with scholarship describing Tagorean ethics as centred on inner freedom and moral education [17], [23]. In the sampled Hindi corpus, by contrast, ethical indicators more frequently attach to the exposure of structural wrongdoing — Premchand’s narratives repeatedly stage moments where a character’s private

conscience is overwhelmed or thwarted by an unjust social order (as in *Sadgati*, where Dukhi's death exposes the indifference of caste hierarchy), producing an ethics of witness rather than an ethics of interior cultivation [12], [13].

9.2 Identity

Bengali identity-indicators cluster around the negotiation between nation and universal humanity, reflecting Tagore's well-documented ambivalence toward nationalism [16], [20]. Hindi identity-indicators, in the sampled corpus, cluster more around caste and regional-rural belonging, reflecting the Hindi public sphere's closer engagement with agrarian north Indian social structure [14], [28].

9.3 Gender

Gender indicators are present at comparable overall frequency in both corpora but resolve differently: sampled Bengali texts more often grant female characters an arc of self-realisation or moral agency even within constrained social roles [1], [4], consistent with thematic surveys of Bengali feminist literature; sampled Hindi texts more often use female suffering as the vehicle for exposing caste and class injustice, with the woman's own agency remaining secondary to her symbolic function within the justice-narrative [10], [11]. This literary-level pattern is broadly consistent with, though not reducible to, the independent linguistic finding that Bengali exhibits comparatively higher honorific marking of women than Hindi [2], [3].

9.4 Social Justice

Justice indicators are markedly more frequent and more structurally central in the sampled Hindi corpus, consistent with Premchand's status as the founder of Hindi-Urdu social realism [13]. Notably, several Premchand texts stage injustice without narrative resolution — corrective justice is withheld even as the moral wrong is exposed, a pattern explicitly theorised in recent Dalit-critical readings of *Ghaaswali* [10]. The sampled Bengali corpus addresses social justice more often through gradualist reformism (education, individual conscience-raising) than through direct depiction of structural violence.

10. Comparative Analysis

Value Domain	Bengali Literary Tendency	Hindi Literary Tendency	Representative Evidence
Ethics	Interiorised, humanist, conscience-centred	Externalised, witness-based, structurally critical	[12], [17], [23]
Identity	Nation vs. universal humanity; Bhadrak reformism	Caste and agrarian rural belonging	[14], [16], [28]
Gender	Agency and self-realisation within constrained roles; higher honorific marking	Symbolic/instrumental role in exposing injustice; lower honorific marking	[12], [4], [10]
Social Justice	Gradualist, reform-oriented, individual-level	Structural, direct, often left unresolved	[10], [13]
Dominant Idiom	Poetic/metaphorical	Direct socio-political commentary	[6]

The divergence index Δ_k (Section 8), applied heuristically to the sampled corpus, is estimated as positive for Ethics and Identity (Bengali > Hindi) and negative for Social Justice (Hindi > Bengali), with Gender showing a mixed, cross-cutting pattern — high in both traditions but differently resolved. This pattern is consistent with, and extends, the qualitative literature reviewed in Section 2: it suggests that the two traditions are not simply variations on a shared “Indian” moral vision but represent genuinely distinct — and historically explicable — configurations of the same four value-domains, shaped respectively by Bengal’s early urban reformist modernity and the Hindi belt’s closer literary engagement with agrarian caste society [25]–[28].

11. Advantages of the Proposed Approach

- 1. Integrative scope:** unlike single-domain studies, the four-domain framework captures how ethics, identity, gender, and justice interact within individual texts rather than treating them in isolation.
- 2. Cross-linguistic comparability:** the thematic-intensity model provides a transparent, if heuristic, basis for comparing texts across languages without requiring fluent bilingual computational infrastructure.
- 3. Triangulation with independent evidence:** literary-level findings are cross-

checked against independent computational-linguistic findings on gender marking [2], [3], strengthening the reliability of the gender-domain conclusions.

4. Replicability: the six-step procedure (Section 7) is explicit enough to be applied by other researchers to an expanded corpus.

5. Pedagogical value: the framework is readily adaptable for comparative-literature teaching, offering students a structured method for cross-linguistic close reading.

12. Limitations

1. Corpus size and canonical bias: the purposive sample privileges canonical, well-anthologised authors (Tagore, Premchand); this risks under-representing regional, oral, and non-canonical voices in both traditions.

2. Translation dependency: analysis relies substantially on English translations cross-checked against originals rather than exhaustive original-language close reading, which may attenuate register- and dialect-level nuance, particularly honorific and syntactic gender-marking effects documented in [2] and [3].

3. Coder subjectivity: although the coding procedure (Section 7) aims at transparency, thematic indicator assignment retains an irreducible interpretive component typical of qualitative content analysis.

4. Heuristic quantification: the intensity model (Section 8) is illustrative rather than statistically generalisable; Δ_k values should be read as organising heuristics, not as claims of population-level significance.

5. Historical scope: the study privileges the late-colonial to mid-twentieth-century period in depth; contemporary digital-era and diasporic Bengali and Hindi writing are discussed only briefly.

13. Future Scope

Future research should (i) extend the corpus to include contemporary Dalit, Adivasi, queer, and diasporic Bengali and Hindi writing, where intersectional treatment of gender, caste, and identity is especially pronounced; (ii) combine the qualitative framework proposed here with computational text-analysis methods — building on emerging work auditing gender bias in Bengali and Hindi language models and corpora [2], [3] — to scale the thematic-intensity model to larger digitised

literary cor-pora; (iii) extend the comparative method to a third and fourth Indian language (e.g., Tamil, Urdu, Marathi) to test whether the Bengali/Hindi divergence pattern identified here reflects a general colonial-modernity effect or a genuinely bilateral cultural difference, building on Mani's broader comparative framework [5]; and (iv) undertake reception-history research examining how translation choices (particularly of honorifics and gendered address) shape cross-linguistic readers' perception of ethical and gendered meaning.

14. CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed and applied an integrated comparative framework for studying how Bengali and Hindi literature articulate human values — ethics, identity, gender, and social justice — across a shared but differently inflected history of socio-cultural change. The comparative analysis indicates that Bengali literature, exemplified by Tagore, has historically favoured an interiorised, humanist-ethical idiom shaped by nineteenth-century reformist modernity and an ambivalent relationship to nationalism, while Hindi literature, exemplified by Premchand, has favoured a more directly activist, structurally focused idiom of social realism shaped by caste and agrarian social critique. Both traditions converge, however, in an intensifying and increasingly intersectional attention to gender, caste, and marginalised identity in more recent writing. The proposed four-domain analytical framework, six-step analytical procedure, and thematic-intensity model together offer a replicable methodological contribution for future comparative work across India's multilingual literary landscape, with direct relevance to comparative literature, translation studies, gender studies, and the emerging digital humanities of South Asian languages.

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