



Research article

# Textual Paradigm: Reading, Analyzing, and Positioning the Indian Banknotes Issued Post-Independence as Texts

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## Abstract

Postmodern liberty has been a luxury to the creators to some extent. With regards to text and its functions, the viewpoint of considering everything as a text bloomed out of Derrida's mind in his *Of Grammatology* (1967). Just as postmodern literature challenges linear narratives and fixed meanings, through the analysis of Indian banknotes as textual artifacts, the interrogation of the semiotic dimensions of banknotes, and how they function as sites of ideological contestation, memory-making, and cultural representation being a text is possible. The textual analysis is performed by applying the picture theory of W.J.T. Mitchell to deconstruct the elements embedded, which in turn access the knowledge of the text's world and how it could be part of the same. The idea of considering Indian banknotes as texts is a result of the advancements that have been happening in the printing industry. Due to such kind of never-ending upgradation, the conventional ideas of authorship, textuality, and interpretation are challenged and given a new dimension by considering Indian banknotes as subject matter. Further, the present study delineates the culture and history of the Nation as represented in the select texts.

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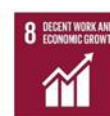
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## Introduction

Postmodern liberty has been a luxury to the creators to some extent. With regards to text and its functions, the viewpoint of considering everything as a text bloomed out of Derrida's mind in *Of Grammatology* (1967).

That which I call a text is practically everything... Speech is a text, gesture is a text, reality is a text in this new sense. This is not about re-establishing graphocentrism alongside logocentrism or phonocentrism or text-centrism. The text is not a centre. The text is an openness without borders, of ever-differentiating references. (Derrida, 1967)

Within the postmodern framework, situating Indian paper money as a text is the result of destabilizing challenges of postmodernism which form the basis for analyzing the same to understand the cultural and narrative exposure recorded in it. The analysis involves the exploration of semantic, cultural, and socio-political elements present in it which deconstructs the underlying power structures and historical representations embedded in Indian currency notes is the essential operation here. Just as postmodern literature challenges linear narratives and fixed meanings, through the analysis of Indian banknotes as textual artifacts, the interrogation of the semiotic dimensions of banknotes, and how they function as sites of ideological contestation, memory-making, and cultural representation being a text is possible. This process offers a compelling entry point into broader conversations about representation, identity, and power in the contemporary world, challenging us to rethink our assumptions about money, value, and meaning in an era of flux and uncertainty. Moreover, by situating Indian banknotes within the broader discourses of globalization, consumerism, and post-colonialism, it is possible to inquire how currency shapes and is shaped by social relations, economic systems, and political ideologies in an increasingly interconnected world.

The representation of historical events or landscapes produces a sort of historical tension. When one examines the construct of the banknotes, the narratives produced as a result of this tension are because of both the collective memory and the interpretative nature of human cognition. At this juncture, the acknowledgment of the absence of an author asserts that the absence here means the presence of multiple authors. Indian banknotes are not designed by an individual or set of constant committees. It changes from time to time and this temporality directly affirms the absence of fixed authors and the presence of multiple personalities in constructing the banknotes. Thus, the reevaluation of conventional ideas of authorship, interpretation, and textuality is necessary to analyze the Indian currency as a textual artifact. The banknotes have the nature of fluidity in making meaning to the public, unlike the traditional texts provided with the absence of an author. The meanings are constructed and negotiated through cultural practices, social interactions, and historical memory. An attempt to view the discoursed Indian paper money as a text offers a new dimension to process the thoughts into how currency acts as artifacts of culture and history. This interdisciplinary inquiry allows us to rethink money, value, and the narrative produced when it is read.

## Research Problem

Most Indian currency notes are used solely for economic purposes, while the narratives they create while an individual interacts with them remain unexplored. The underlying narratives created by the collision of images and texts are always ignored and unnoticed in a materialistic society. The focus on identifying the denomination is not equally focused on understanding the implied meaning of the construct of each currency.

## Objectives

- To analyze the composition of the paper money issued after the independence
- To position the Indian banknotes as texts within the postmodern discourse
- To interpret the select banknotes and decode the encoded cultural and historical implications
- To understand how the blend of pictures and texts makes the banknotes communicate history and culture
- To assimilate the advancements in printing technology as a source for the evolving structure of texts throughout the ages

## Related Literature Review

The articles related to the elements considered for the present study have been reviewed. The review focuses on the early coins, security features of the existing Indian paper money, digital currency in India, and the core concepts of the picture theory of W.J.T. Mitchell.

For trade, the barter system was followed by ancient people and then the introduction of metal currency made it easier.

Initially, Indian coins depicted only the religious motifs as authentication mark and subsequently after the advent of the Greeks and the Sakas, the political signs like the bust of ruling king and the name of the issuing authority were used on one side along with the religious motifs on the other side to authenticate the metallic currency. (Radhakrishnan, 2022)

This detail shows that the change happens with the advent of the external force. Drawing parallels to the evolution in the representation, the addition of the various picture motifs in Indian paper money is due to the development of the printing industry in India. European trading businesses brought paper currency to India in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, during that time, the notes issued by the banks were in text format. As British trade in India flourished, the use of paper money also grew. Eventually, in Indian paper money, a picture emerged featuring a female figure portraying the queen of Britain. Additionally, they started adding the name of the publishing bank. As the time passes by and the technological growth hits hard, the inclusion of various elements in the currency notes also started touching different heights. A study conducted by Sonia Sarkar and Arun Kiran Pal in 2023 analyzed the various distinguishing aspects of the old and new versions of

Indian paper currency notes are examined and contrasted. A list of security aspects of Indian currencies has been provided and discussed. Various common ways for determining authenticity and recognizing a letter have been presented. It has been discovered that each technique has its own goal and meaning.

There are several security features which are built on Indian bank notes that deter counterfeiting. Some of these security features are already incorporated in the substrate during papermaking process and some in the printing process. These features are then further classified into public recognizable features and machine readable features. (Sonia Sarkar & Arun Kiran Pal, 2023)

Numerous traditional tools can be used to identify various aspects of a note. To identify diverse strategies, the detection method is divided into two parts: the first line detection method and the second line detection method.

India has made remarkable strides in digital payment innovation. Digital currency is not a new concept. We already make regular payments using digital methods such as Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS), National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT), and Immediate Payment Service (IMPS). (Md. Haque Asraful & Shoaib Mohd, 2023)

The increased reliability in the digital space of society is paving the way for continuous digital upgradation and vice-versa. Society is slowly reaching a point where the experience of physical currency has been missing because of the easily available QR codes and UPI transactions.

Digital currencies continue to gain popularity and are increasingly being adopted by businesses and consumers around the world. Digital currencies can be broadly divided into two categories: Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and Cryptocurrency. (Md. Haque Asraful & Shoaib Mohd, 2023)

India is heading towards an economy where the use of digital currency would replace physical currency. This situation would result in a state where the absence of textual experience with the hard cash would be present and the operation becomes more monetary. The images and texts being printed on the banknotes of India are directly related to the history and culture of the Nation. To deconstruct the meanings behind each element present in it, the application of the picture theory of W.J.T. Mitchell helps the process.

In Picture Theory, I wanted to treat the pictorial object as a subject capable of self-reflection, so that pictures could become self-theorizing symbols or "metapictures." That is what motivates strange, awkward title, "picture theory." It expresses an imperative "to picture" theory rather than to construct a theory "of" pictures. The aim is to let pictures "do" theory and give theory a physical, visible, figured body. (Wiesenthal & Bucknell, 2000, p. 2)

W.J.T. Mitchell said the above lines during an interview with Christine Wiesenthal, and Brad Bucknell (2000). The new media and the advent of images as image-text were highlighted, and he drew on a variety of theoretical inspirations, with a concentration on individual examples rather than overall theory. Mitchell's art is centered on the image as an inaccessible "black hole" in the verbal framework as the result of printing advancements happening right from the late 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The idea of disseminating Indian paper money as a text involves special attention to viewing the same through the lens of the picture theory to vocalize the appropriateness of the discourse.

## **Research Gap**

While past researchers have examined Indian banknotes as a tool for economic operation, the present study differs from those studies by focusing on the Indian banknotes from a textual perspective and offers the implied meaning of each of the elements present in it as a text.

## **Methodology**

While exploring the possibilities of considering the currency as a text, the division given by Dan Melzer and Deborah Coxwell-Teague in their *Everything's Text* (2011) is useful in introducing and comprehending intersectionality. They are medium and mode. They considered mode as a channel and medium as a tool to communicate thoughts.

Understanding the way that the medium of a composition affects its content can help you understand and analyze any type of text, whether the medium is a sculpture, Web site, or poster. The medium that a composer uses to deliver her message affects every aspect of the content of a message. (Dan Melzer & Deborah Coxwell-Teague, 2011)

The mode and medium are closely connected. Print mode and visual mode are the two types of modes. Here, the Indian paper money falls in the section where both modes intersect as visual-print mode since it has scripts and images intertwined along with the symbols and narrates the history and culture of India. In the present qualitative study, the select texts (medium) are stated for their chronological background. The theoretical framework is drafted and applied to the select Indian banknotes. The textual analysis is performed with applied theory to deconstruct the elements embedded which in turn access the knowledge of the text's world and how it could be part of the same.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The relationship between the images and languages produces visual imagery that gives symbolic meaning to society. Picture theory provides the key concepts to see through Indian currency notes. It sheds light on how the text and image intersect to form narratives of Indian history. The theoretical framework provides a ground to analyse Indian banknotes focusing on the iconological significance, intermedial features, metapictorial qualities, textual relationships, political implications, and the notable shift, the pictorial turn.

William Jon Mitchell is a scholar of visual culture, media studies, and art history. He is most known for his work on the interaction of images and languages. His efforts push traditional boundaries and provide transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary viewpoints in a broad sense. One of his most notable books is *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1995). Mitchell has expounded on the relationship between images and language, as well as how they interact and

enhance the meanings that they make when used together. He popularized the notions of "iconology" and "metapictures". During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, he investigated images that reflected the act of representation itself, attempting to dissolve the boundaries between image and word through the concept of "metapictures". The "pictorial turn" occurred as a result of industrialization. This has improved knowledge of the relationship between language, images, and power in modern society. Mitchell's Picture Theory has long been regarded as a landmark work in the study of visual culture.

The major tenets of the picture theory are the pictorial turn, intermediality, the picture-word relationship, metapicture, and political and cultural representation. These tenets are applied to the banknotes issued after the republic. The Lion Capital series, the Mahatma Gandhi series, the Mahatma Gandhi new series.

### The Select Texts and the Historical Implications

The Indian banknotes issued after independence can be classified into three categories namely, the lion capital series, Mahatma Gandhi Series, Mahatma Gandhi new series. These banknotes issued in different years hold plenty of narratives. They are non-linear and non-fictitious. It can be understood by the close examination of these visual texts where images and words interplay to create meaning. The present analysis attempts to list the elements present in the banknotes and then apply the picture theory of W.J.T. Mitchell to underscore the upgradation of the structure of the text as a result of technological advancements of the post-modern era.

This section is divided into two parts namely the select text and the historical implications for each categories. Since the Indian banknotes are the select texts for the present analysis, they are presented first and the implications of the respective series are followed with the mentions.

### The Select Texts: Lion Capital Series



Figure 1: Rs. 10 of Lion Capital Series (1)





Figure 2: Rs.2 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 3: Rs.5 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 4: Rs.10 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 5: Rs.100 of Lion Capital Series (1)





Figure 6: Rs.1000 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 7: Rs.5000 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 8: Rs.10000 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 9: Rs.2 of Lion Capital Series (2)





Figure 10: Rs.2 of Lion Capital Series (3)



Figure 21: Rs.5 of Lion Capital Series (2)



Figure 32: Rs.5 of Lion Capital Series (3)



Figure 43: Rs.100 of Lion Capital Series (2)





Figure 54: Rs.1 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 65: Rs.2 of Lion Capital Series (4)



Figure 76: Rs.5 of Lion Capital Series (4)



Figure 87: Rs.10 of Lion Capital Series (2)





Figure 98: Rs.100 of Lion Capital Series (3)



Figure 109: Rs.20 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 20: Rs.50 of Lion Capital Series (1)



Figure 21: Rs.1 of Lion Capital Series (2)





Figure 22: Rs.2 of Lion Capital Series (5)



Figure 23: Rs.5 of Lion Capital Series (5)



Figure 24: Rs.10 of Lion Capital Series (3)



Figure 25: Rs.10 of Lion Capital Series (4)





Figure 26: Rs.20 of Lion Capital Series (2)



Figure 27: Rs.100 of Lion Capital Series (4)



Figure 28: Rs.500 of Lion Capital Series (1)

## Historical Implications of Lion Capital Series

The construct of the banknotes includes the name of the issuing authority (Reserve Bank of India), a promissory statement (I Promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of), and a portrait of the lion capital emblem, RBI emblem, and different serial numbers. In the subsequent issues, the statement “I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of” was reframed as “I promise to pay the bearer the sum of”. The phrase “on demand” was omitted.

In 1950, the first Republic India banknotes were issued in the denominations of Rs. 2, 5, 10 and 100. There was slight variation in colour and design in case of Rs.2, 5 and 100 notes.

The ship motif on the reverse of Rs.10 note was kept intact for the sake of continuity. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

The technologies used in printing have strongly upgraded at that point to manage to print pictures, unlike the past banknotes.

In 1953, Hindi was displayed prominently on the new notes. The debate regarding the Hindi plural of Rupaya was settled in favour of Rupiye. High denomination notes (Rs. 1,000, 5,000, and 10,000) were reintroduced in 1954. High denomination notes were once again demonetised in 1978 for the same reasons as the 1946 demonetisation. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

The depiction of a sailing boat on Rs.10 banknote (Figure 1, Figure 4) have historical significance. It depicts India's rich nautical past, economic reliance on sea trade, and cultural ties established through water routes. For decades, Indian merchants have traveled to the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia to trade spices, textiles, and precious stones. This maritime activity helped to establish India as a major hub in the global trade network. India was an integral part of this vast trade network, connecting it to places like the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf, and East Africa. Even during colonial times, India played an important role in world trade due to its strategic location along key ocean routes.

The tiger, deer, and elephant were depicted on several denominations (Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 5, Figure 9, Figure 10, Figure 11, and Figure 12) of Indian banknotes in the Lion Capital Series, each with significant cultural and symbolic meaning.

The small denomination of Rs. 2 and 5 of the early series depicted the fauna motifs such as tiger, bucks and doe, Sambar deers and gazelles. In 1975, a collage of motifs explaining India's agricultural endeavour towards attaining self-sufficiency in food production found represented on Rs. 100 note depicting the activities of farming and plucking of tea leaves. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

The ₹2 note (Figure 2) depicts a tiger, a symbol of India's strength, courage, and wildlife heritage. The majestic tiger, India's national animal, was depicted as a symbol of the country's strength and tenacity, emphasizing its cultural and ecological significance. The ₹5 note (Figure 5) features a deer, representing serenity, grace, and harmony with nature. The deer holds profound meaning in Indian culture, particularly in Buddhism, because it is associated with Lord Buddha's first lecture at Sarnath.

The lean period of the early sixties led to considerations of economy and the sizes of notes were reduced in 1967. In 1969 a commemorative design series in honour of the birth centenary celebrations of Mahatma Gandhi was issued depicting a seated Gandhi with the Sevagram Ashram as the backdrop. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

The Brihadeeswarar Temple in Thanjavur, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, built in the early 11th century, towering vimanas and exquisite sculptures represented in Rs.1000 (Figure 6) demonstrate the designers' technical prowess and artistic vision, demonstrating a strong respect for heavenly storytelling. Culturally, the temple serves as a thriving community hub, organizing festivals and rituals that strengthen devotees' collective identity and continuity. The temple's inscriptions provide unique insights into the Chola period's sociopolitical processes, chronicling land

donations and temple administration that show the relationship between religion and governance. As time passes, the Brihadeeswarar Temple stands as a testament to the Chola dynasty's enduring influence.

Delhi's Red Fort, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was the center of the Mughal Empire during its peak in the 17th century and has enormous historical and cultural value which is represented in Rs.5000 (Figure 7). The elaborate architecture and red sandstone walls, designed by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, brilliantly represent the splendor of Mughal architecture, which incorporated Timurid, Indian, and Persian features. It has historically been the primary home of Mughal rulers, a political hub, and the site of major events such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857. It eventually became a symbol of India's struggle for independence, and the Prime Minister raises the national flag there on Independence Day.

Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram, as represented in the Indian banknotes (Figure 15, Figure 16, Figure 17, and Figure 18) built in 1917 near Ahmedabad, is a significant place in India's struggle for independence. It represents Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of nonviolence, self-sufficiency, and social equality. At this lively community committed to truth and simplicity, the ashram was more than just a place to live. Gandhi and his allies carried out a number of initiatives there, notably the 1930 Salt March, which spurred people to rise against British control. The Ashram is significant not just because of its historical background, but also because it embodies Gandhi's vision of an egalitarian society that fosters self-reliance through projects like khadi production.

"Cost-benefit considerations prompted the Bank to introduce Rs. 20 denomination notes in 1972 and Rs. 50 in 1975" (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.). The Indian Parliament building (Figure 19 & Figure 20) was one of the primary architectural motifs represented on this banknote. The representation of the Parliament in this series omitted the national flag, which is noteworthy given that the flag was frequently seen fluttering atop later iterations of Indian banknotes. The edifice, designed by British architects Edwin Lutyens and Herbert Baker, represented the institutional framework of colonial rule. The Indian Parliament was constructed in 1927, during British administration. However, when India attained independence in 1947, the Parliament became the seat of the Indian Republic, signaling the country's transformation from colonial control to an independent, democratic state.

An important historical turning point in India's journey toward energy independence is the oil rig. India's post-independence industrialization was largely focused on acquiring energy supplies to drive economic growth.

The 1980s saw a completely new set of notes issued. The motifs on these notes marked a departure from the earlier motifs. The emphasis lay on symbols of Science & Technology (Aryabhatta on the Rs. 2 note), Progress (the Oil Rig on Re 1 and Farm Mechanisation on Rs. 5 and Hirakud dam on Rs. 100) and a change in orientation to Indian Art forms on the Rs. 20 and the Rs. 10 notes. (Konark Wheel, Peacock, Shalimar garden). (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

In 1974, the Bombay high oil field (Figure 21) was discovered, marking a significant turning point in India's progress towards energy independence. Located off the coast of Mumbai, this offshore oil field is one of India's largest discoveries. The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) was

instrumental in the development of this area, significantly reducing India's reliance on imported oil. The construction of oil rigs similar to those in Bombay High represented India's dedication to industrialization and its entry into the world oil market.

The satellite, named for the ancient Indian mathematician and astronomer Aryabhata (Figure 22), was designed and developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and launched from the Soviet Union using a Kosmos-3M launch vehicle because India did not yet have its own launch capabilities. Aryabhata was primarily intended for scientific experiments in X-ray astronomy and solar physics, marking a significant advancement in India's space program, and following its launch, it was featured on the ₹2 denomination of Indian banknotes starting in the 1980s. The satellite's imagery represented India's advancements in space technology, research, and scientific innovation, and resonated with the nation's growing capability in space exploration.

The picture of the tractor on Indian banknote (Figure 23), underlines the great historical significance of agricultural modernization in post-independence India. The tractor symbolizes India's desire for modernization, particularly during the Green Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, when automated farming implements like tractors played a significant role in raising agricultural productivity. Previous to this, the majority of Indian agriculture was conventional and ineffective, frequently leading to food shortages. The government's emphasis on tractor mechanization revolutionized agriculture, enabling India to become a food-self-sufficient nation and reducing rural poverty by increasing farm incomes. The tractor is a potent symbol of national development because it thus symbolizes not only technological advancement but also the accomplishment of policies meant to modernize the agricultural sector, improve food security, and uplift rural India.

Management of Currency had to cope with the rising demands of a growing economy, together with a fall in purchasing power. The Rs. 500 note was introduced in October 1987 with the portrait of Mahatma Gandhi. The watermark continued to be the Lion Capital, Ashoka Pillar. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan created the Shalimar Gardens (Figure 25) in Lahore between 1641 and 1642. These gardens are a magnificent illustration of the artistic genius and splendor of Mughal garden design. The gardens' symmetrical layout, intricate water features, and lush vegetation, which symbolized both imperial might and spiritual aspirations and mirrored the Islamic idea of paradise, were inspired by the Persian "Chahar Bagh" architecture. They served as symbols of cultural pride throughout British colonial authority, shaped architectural trends over the decades, and are today an integral part of Pakistan's national legacy. Despite being a UNESCO World Heritage site, the gardens nevertheless highlight the rich artistic legacy of the Mughal era.

The Hirakud Dam, one of the world's longest earthen dams (Figure 27), represents India's commitment to large-scale infrastructure development following independence. The dam, constructed over the Mahanadi River in Odisha and finished in 1957, was a significant achievement in water management and flood control. Its depiction on Rs.100 highlights India's emphasis on modernizing its agricultural sector through irrigation, improving water supplies for drinking and industrial use, and producing hydroelectric power. The dam was instrumental in improving the agricultural economy by supplying irrigation to millions of hectares of crops and preventing devastating floods in the region. It represents the importance of infrastructure in India's



development strategy, emphasizing the efforts to secure water and energy resources for the country's expanding population and industrial sector.

### The Select Texts: Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 29: Rs.10 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 30: Rs.20 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 31: 50 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 32: Rs.100 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 33: Rs.500 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 34: Rs.500 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



Figure 35: Rs.1000 of Mahatma Gandhi Series



## Historical Implications of Mahatma Gandhi Series

With the advancement of reprographic techniques, traditional security features were deemed inadequate. It was necessary to introduce new features and a new 'Mahatma Gandhi Series' was introduced in 1996. A changed watermark, windowed security thread, latent image, and intaglio features for the visually handicapped were among the new features. The new series also witnessed the introduction of Rs. 1000 denomination on October 09, 2000. Subsequently, on November 18, 2000, Rs. 500 denomination note was issued in changed colour and incorporating colour-shifting ink in the numeric value at the centre as an additional security feature. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

The tiger, elephant, and rhinoceros collage on Indian banknote (Figure 29) is a reflection of the country's great biodiversity and the cultural significance of these three famous creatures. The elephant symbolizes wisdom and prosperity, strongly linked to customs and regal lineage, especially associated with the deity Ganesha. The tiger, on the other hand, is a symbol of strength and grace, representing India's untamed heritage and its cultural devotion in mythology. The Indian rhinoceros, which is particularly common in northeastern India, represents the nation's distinctive biodiversity and draws attention to its conservation efforts, especially in areas like Kaziranga National Park. Their depiction highlights India's dedication to protecting wildlife, bringing attention to threatened species, and encouraging public support for programs like Project Tiger (1973). It also highlights the necessity of sustainable practices and the economic significance of wildlife tourism, which boosts regional economies. All together, these collage pieces serve as a reminder of the inextricable bond between these animals, the cultural character of India, and the continuous need to safeguard natural ecosystems and maintain ecological balance for coming generations.

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, in particular, are shown on Indian banknotes (Figure 30) with significant historical significance. This is mainly because of their colonial legacy as a penal colony under British rule, where the infamous Cellular Jail in Port Blair was a site of great suffering for freedom fighters and later came to represent the fight for independence. India's historical significance in global trade and colonial dynamics was emphasized by the strategic relevance of the islands in controlling sea routes. Their depiction on currency serves as a reminder of the tenacity of the Indian character in the face of colonial persecution while also honoring the sacrifices made by political prisoners and the larger background of India's struggle for freedom. The islands also serve as a symbol of the complexity of Indian identity, highlighting the diversity of indigenous tribes' cultures and underscoring the importance of respecting their rights and cultural legacy. The islands represent both the terrible legacy of colonialism and the continuous dedication to maintaining ecological and cultural integrity in the face of contemporary difficulties, making this historical account essential reading for everyone interested in comprehending India's path towards sovereignty.

Significant historical ramifications result from the Himalayan Mountains' depiction on the Mahatma Gandhi Series (Figure 32), which stands for the country's rich natural heritage, cultural identity, and spiritual significance. Many people find inspiration and spiritual guidance in the Himalayas, often known as the "abode of snow," which have long been cherished in Indian history and mythology. The Himalayas are also connected to the ancient sages and spiritual leaders. The

significance of these magnificent mountains as a national emblem, representing India's geographical diversity and the close bond between its people and environment, is highlighted by their representation on banknotes. In addition, the Himalayas are essential to the ecosystem of the nation since they supply rivers that feed millions of people with water. The inclusion of the mountains in the currency design serves as a reminder of the historical and cultural themes entwined with this iconic range and symbolizes India's commitment to environmental conservation and the preservation of its natural landscapes.

The Rs.1000 (Figure 35) represents oil rig, paddy, steel foundry, a girl working with a computer, and a satellite collectively encapsulate India's diverse economic and cultural landscape while also reflecting significant historical milestones. Since rice is a staple meal and has been a major element of Indian agriculture for ages, paddy fields, which symbolize rice farming, have been important. In the 1960s, efforts to increase agricultural output further cemented rice cultivation's popularity. The steel foundry is a symbol of India's industrialization, especially in the wake of the 1956 Industrial Policy, which promoted heavy industries and paved the way for the construction of numerous steel plants as well as the advancement of the manufacturing sector, which was essential to the country's economic change. The picture of a young woman using a computer emphasizes the growth of the information technology industry in the 1990s, which is indicative of the liberalization of the Indian economy and the expansion of opportunities for women in the workforce and in school. It also represents the advancement of gender equality and female empowerment. Lastly, the satellite represents India's progress in space technology, especially since the country launched its first satellite, Aryabhata, in 1975. The Indian Space Research Organization has since accomplished several significant milestones, including the Mars Orbiter Mission in 2013, which has won the organization international acclaim. When taken as a whole, these components show how India's growth goals and identity are shaped by the convergence of agriculture, industry, technology, and cultural values. They also chart the country's progress from independence to the present.

The Republic of India witnessed the second major monetary reform in November 2016 when it withdrew the legal tender status of ₹ 500 and ₹ 1,000 denominations of banknotes of the Mahatma Gandhi Series issued by the Reserve Bank of India till November 8, 2016. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

This demonetization resulted in the introduction of Mahatma Gandhi New Series.



### The Select Texts: Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 36: Rs.10 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 37: Rs.20 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 38: Rs.50 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 39: Rs.100 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 40: Rs.200 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 41: Rs.500 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series



Figure 42: Rs.2000 of Mahatma Gandhi New Series

## Historical Implications of Mahatma Gandhi New Series

The architectural accomplishments are displayed in this series.

The new banknotes were introduced in the Mahatma Gandhi (New) Series, highlighting the cultural heritage and scientific achievements of the country. Distinct colours were used for different denominations and sizes were reduced. Two new denominations viz. ₹ 2000 on November 08, 2016, and ₹ 200 on August 23, 2017, were introduced in the Mahatma Gandhi (New) Series. (Reserve Bank of India, n.d.)

The historical significance of the heritage locations shown on the banknotes of the Mahatma Gandhi New Series underscores the rich cultural history and centuries-long architectural accomplishments of India. As a tribute to Odisha's past and a representation of the sun god, the

Konark Wheel, (Figure 36 & Figure 26) which was a part of the Sun Temple constructed in 1250 CE, represents the extraordinary craftsmanship and engineering of Kalinga architecture. Dating from the fifth to the 10th century CE, the Ellora Caves (Figure 37) are a remarkable example of rock-cut architecture and monastic life that demonstrate the peaceful coexistence of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Known for its magnificent remains that capture the splendor of South Indian architecture and its importance as a major trading hub, Hampi (Figure 38) was the capital of the Vijayanagara Empire, which was founded in the 14th century CE. The Rani Ki Vav (Figure 39), a stepwell in Gujarat constructed in the 11th century CE, is renowned for its exquisite sculptures and technical mastery. It represents the social and cultural importance of water management in ancient India. One of the oldest stone buildings in India, the Sanchi Stupa (Figure 40) was built in the 3rd century BCE during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. It is an important location for Buddhist architecture, symbolizing the dissemination of Buddhism and its intellectual ideas. Constructed by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan in 1638 CE, the Red Fort (Figure 41) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that epitomizes the pinnacle of Mughal architecture and its political significance, signifying India's rich Mughal past.

## **Textual Analysis**

### **Indian Banknotes: Textual Artifacts, Communicating History and Culture of the Nation**

The three categories of Indian banknotes are the Lion Capital series, the Mahatma Gandhi series, and the Mahatma Gandhi New series.

### **The Pictorial Turn**

In *Picture Theory* by W. J. T. Mitchell, he has clearly elaborated on the reason for the happening pictorial turn in the textual world.

If we ask ourselves why a pictorial turn seems to be happening now, in what is often characterized as a "post-Modern" era, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we encounter a paradox. On the one hand, it seems overwhelmingly obvious that the era of video and cybernetic technology, the age of electronic reproduction, has provided unprecedented means of visual simulation and illusionism. (Mitchell, 1992)

The "pictorial turn" in Indian banknotes refers to a shift in design philosophy from predominantly text-based to visually oriented representations on currency notes following India's transition to a republic. This transition occurred in 1950 when India adopted its constitution, declaring itself a democratic republic. Before this period, Indian banknotes primarily featured textual elements such as denomination, issuing authority, and legal clauses, with minimal visual embellishments. However, after becoming a republic, there was a conscious effort to produce Indian banknotes with culturally significant imagery and symbols that reflected the nation's rich heritage, diversity, and aspirations.

The pictorial elements on Indian banknotes began to encompass a wide range of themes, including historical landmarks, iconic personalities, flora and fauna, and architectural wonders.



These images served not only as decorative elements but also as tools for promoting national identity, unity, and pride.

The concept of a pictorial turn opens up a new dimension of the history of culture, just as the concept of the unconscious makes us read art and literature a new way. Not just a history of images as human productions (the traditional task of iconology and art history), but a new, critical history of images that emphasizes their role as "living" historical agents at turning points in human affairs and human understanding. (Mitchell, 2006)

For instance, early Indian banknotes prominently featured images of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation, symbolizing India's struggle for independence and its commitment to non-violence and social justice. Subsequent banknotes incorporated diverse motifs such as the Ashoka Pillar, the Himalayan Mountains, national emblems, parliament, tropical zone, oil rig, satellite, tractor, architecture, and depictions of various cultural traditions from different regions of India. This pictorial turn not only enhanced the aesthetic appeal of Indian currency but also transformed it into a medium for cultural expression and historical commemoration. It played a significant role in promoting a sense of belonging and collective memory among the Indian people.

### **Intermediality**

From Clement Greenberg's celebration of the painterly medium and Marshall McLuhan's maxim 'the medium is the message' to Nicholas Mirzoeff's reiteration of W. J. T. Mitchell on all cultural media being 'necessarily mixed', the question of the medium and medium specificity has been a relevant one in 20th-century critical discourse. (Toikkanen, 2013)

The phrase 'necessarily mixed' given by Mitchell does imply the effectiveness of the intermediality. The intermediality reviews the mutual dependencies and independencies of various areas such as media, designing, printing, and circulation. The process of finalizing the design and incorporating the images and languages is one of the important and artistic duties of the Reserve Bank of India according to the RBI Act of 1934.

In today's visual culture, as described by Mirzoeff above and heralded by Fredric Jameson and Jean Baudrillard three decades ago, we now live in a world that works through nothing but media, bombarding us from all sides at all times in every imaginable way. (Mitchell, 2006)

In India, the Reserve Bank is the only entity authorized to print banknotes, as per Section 22 of the Act. According to Section 25, the Central Government must approve the layout, composition, and design of banknotes after considering suggestions from the RBI's Central Board. The Reserve Bank works with the Central Government and other relevant parties to project how many banknotes, broken down by denomination, will be needed for each fiscal year. It then sets orders for the creation of these banknotes using different currency printing presses. The Reserve Bank guarantees that the public has access to high-quality banknotes by upholding its clean note policy. Banknotes that are taken out of circulation are carefully inspected to uphold this standard.

Four currency presses are used to produce banknotes: two are owned by the Reserve Bank through Bharatiya Reserve Bank Note Mudran Private Ltd. (BRBNMPL), a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Reserve Bank, and the other two are owned by the Government of India through Security Printing and Minting Corporation of India Ltd. (SPMCIL). While BRBNMPL runs its currency presses



in Mysuru, Southern India, and Salboni, Eastern India, SPMCIL operates its presses in Nasik, Western India, and Dewas, Central India. A few scheduled banks have been permitted by the Reserve Bank to set up currency chests to make it easier to distribute rupee coins and banknotes. These are repositories where the Reserve Bank stocks rupee coins and banknotes for distribution to bank branches within their service area. The number of money chests was 2838 as of March 31, 2023. This process involves the mutual coordination of different sectors and this intermediality results in the product as a currency making a multitude of meanings to the readers (i.e., society)

### **Picture/Word Relationship**

The present study considering Indian banknotes for the analysis delineates the boundaries shared by two units namely, image and word. "The relationship between words and images reflects, within the realm of representation, signification, and communication, the relations we posit between symbols and the world, signs and their meanings" (Mitchell, 1986). An intellectual montage was made by the banknote worth one hundred rupees (Figure 13) that was released in 1975. The obverse side of the currency features a center motif that portrays an agricultural setting, with farmers participating in different tasks including planting seeds, harvesting crops, and plowing. The story revolves around this visual, which emphasizes the importance of agriculture to India's economy and culture. Apart from the concrete depictions of farming practices, the banknote integrates symbolic imagery associated with farming customs that are common across several parts of India. The man operating the tractor is dressed traditionally, as are the laborers, who wear sarees. These symbols deepen the story by highlighting the cultural importance and respect that Indian society accords to agriculture. The currency has text or inscriptions of fifteen Indian languages in addition to English and Hindi. The banknote commemorates India's agrarian legacy and emphasizes the crucial importance of farming in the country's identity and economy.

"For Mitchell, the relations between image and word are always "paradoxical." Word and image seem to get along for the most part harmoniously enough, at least until you begin thinking seriously about their relation" (Miller, 1996). The 500 rupees banknote (Figure 33 & Figure 28) issued in the year 2000 shows a picture of Dandi March, which Mahatma Gandhi organized in 1930. To oppose the British salt monopoly, Gandhi and his supporters marched almost 240 miles to the coastal village of Dandi. This historic event marked a pivotal point in India's independence campaign. This image's inclusion highlights the story of peaceful resistance and civil disobedience, highlighting the strength of group action in opposing repressive colonial control. The Dandi March is a representation of a larger movement for social justice, national sovereignty, and self-determination than just a demonstration against salt taxation. Gandhi and his supporters showed the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance as a strategy for political mobilization and social change by breaking British regulations and harvesting salt from the sea. Thus, the spirit of India's freedom movement and its pursuit of equality and dignity is embodied in the images of the Dandi March. The banknote may have further images, symbols, or writing surrounding the Dandi March's main design to offer background information about historical events. Gandhi's supporters are also listed. The incorporation of these aspects enhances the historical narrative, providing viewers with a more comprehensive comprehension of the socio-political dynamics of the era and the wide range of individuals and communities engaged in the fight for independence. The Dandi March's portrayal as a backdrop image in 500 rupee note refers to its ongoing significance and impact on India's collective memory and national identity, even outside of its immediate historical setting.

The picture upholds the principles of nonviolence, inclusion, and resiliency that are still relevant in modern Indian society while also serving as a reminder of the innumerable lives lost in the fight for freedom and justice.

Though he recognizes, of course, that words and images have always contaminated one another in the West, that the dream of a pure artifact that would be all word and no image or all image and no word has always been a chimera, nevertheless he argues that we are at a historical moment in the West when the visible and the readable are interacting in new ways. In these new varieties of media, picture may be even more important than word. (Miller, 1996)

The backdrop picture portraying the Dandi March also presents one of the followers asking another man to join the march. This detail shows the struggle involved in convincing people to get out of the colonial domination and start protesting. The emotions are conveyed in a larger context to the world by this single detail. It evokes the mind of the reader to think about the interplay of patriotism and emotional considerations involved during the freedom struggle.

### **Political and Cultural Representation**

The representation of Indian culture and the politics in Indian banknotes has been done with craftsmanship. "World is already clothed in our systems of representation" (Mitchell, 1986). The obverse side of Lion Capital Series banknotes has the iconic motif of the Lion Capital of Ashoka, which has great cultural significance in Indian history. This famous sculpture, which was first placed atop a pillar at Sarnath in the third century BCE by Emperor Ashoka, depicts four Asiatic lions standing back to back, signifying strength, power, and sovereignty. A circular abacus with elaborate carvings of animals, wheels, and other symbols rests beneath the lions. These sculptures symbolize Ashoka's devotion to dharma, or morality, and his pursuit of social welfare, tolerance, and peace. India affirms its political authority and historical continuity as a republic by designating the Lion Capital as its national emblem and placing it prominently on its currency. The nation's dedication to preserving secularism, plurality, and democratic values as stated in the Constitution is emphasized by the usage of this symbol. It also emphasizes the persistence of India's political and cultural legacy spanning centuries, reflecting the country's wish to embrace modernization and progress while yet taking inspiration from its ancient history.

"The notion that we live in a culture dominated by images, by spectacle, surveillance, and visual display, is so utterly commonplace that I am sometimes astonished at the way people announce it as if they had just discovered it" (W.J.T. Mitchell, 2006). In honor of Mahatma Gandhi's crucial role in India's fight for independence and his ongoing effect on the country's ethos, the Mahatma Gandhi Series of banknotes featured his portrait as the main motif. The act of designating Gandhi's portrait on Indian banknotes further exemplifies the image's dominance over the society's construct of the economic artifact (i.e., banknotes). Gandhi's picture, with his signature round glasses and calm demeanor, represents his devotion to truth and nonviolence, his moral and ethical leadership, and his idea of a just and equal society. Gandhi's image appears on Indian banknotes, a testament to the country's respect for his ideals and his standing as its founding father. India's democratic values, cultural history, and aspirations for progress and prosperity are reinforced by the imagery of significant sites, monuments, and symbols of national pride shown on these banknotes alongside the portrait of Gandhi. For instance, the 50 rupee note's reverse

(Figure 31) features a picture of New Delhi's Parliament House (this time with the flag unlike the lion capital series), signifying India's dedication to democracy, lawmaking, and government.

The Mahatma Gandhi New Series of banknotes continues the tradition of featuring Mahatma Gandhi's portrait as the central motif, reaffirming his enduring legacy and influence on India's collective conscience. Quotes such as "Satyameva Jayate" (Truth alone triumphs) reaffirm India's commitment to ethical governance and democratic values, emphasizing the political ideals of transparency, integrity, and accountability. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan logo on the 500 rupee note reflects the government's initiatives and policies aimed at addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges. Gandhi's image on these banknotes serves as a reminder of his principles of truth, nonviolence, and social justice, which continue to inspire generations of Indians and shape the nation's ethos and aspirations. In addition to Gandhi's portrait, the Mahatma Gandhi New Series incorporates images of iconic Indian landmarks, symbols of progress, and achievements in science and technology. For instance, the reverse of the 2000 rupees note (Figure 42) features the Mars Orbiter Mission (Mangalyaan), India's successful space mission to Mars, symbolizing the country's technological advancement, scientific achievements, and aspirations for global leadership in space exploration. These images highlight India's commitment to innovation, progress, and excellence in various fields, reflecting its aspirations for the future.

### **Metapictorial Elements**

According to W.J.T. Mitchell, "metapictures" are pictures that symbolize or reflect the act of imagining itself. Indian banknotes frequently have recognizable motifs that, by recalling larger cultural themes, function as metapictures.

The metapicture, then, is also a figure that helps to explain the often-observed uncanniness of images, their ghostliness or spectrality, their tendency to look back at the beholder, or seemingly to respond to the presence of the beholder, to "want something" from the beholder. (W.J.T. Mitchell, 2006)

For instance, the Ashoka Lion Capital image found on Indian banknotes can be viewed as a metapicture since it pays homage to the country's ancient past and its visual language while also serving as a representation of the national insignia. Indian banknote portraits of historical leaders, like Mahatma Gandhi, can be seen as metapictures. "The widest implication of the metapicture is that pictures might themselves be sites of theoretical discourse, not merely passive objects awaiting explanation by some non-pictorial (or iconoclastic) master-discourse" (Mitchell, 2006). These images not only honor the individuals depicted but also serve as reflections on the history and ideals they represent. Gandhi's presence, for instance, embodies the values of nonviolence, truth, and social justice, reflecting upon India's struggle for independence and its commitment to democratic principles. Indian currency often showcases architectural marvels and historical landmarks, such as the Red Fort, the Rani Ki Vav, the Ellora caves, the Sanchi Stupa etc. These images can be seen as metapictures that reflect upon the cultural and artistic achievements of Indian civilization, inviting viewers to contemplate the significance of these structures within the broader context of Indian history and identity.

It is clear, to begin with, that images do not belong exclusively to any single discipline—not semiotics, or art history, or media studies, or even cultural studies (if it is a discipline). Their study compels us to be interdisciplinary at a bare minimum, just as paleontology requires that its researchers be geologists, biologists, anatomists, and artists. (W.J.T. Mitchell, 2006)

The use of cultural motifs and traditional patterns on Indian currency notes can be interpreted as metapictures that reflect India's rich artistic heritage and the aesthetic traditions of its diverse cultures.

### **The Common features in the Lion Capital Series, Mahatma Gandhi Series, and Mahatma Gandhi New Series**

India's national emblem features a picture of three lions standing in an abacus (one frontal and two in profile; the fourth is concealed from view), and it was adapted from the lion capital of the Ashoka pillar at Sarnath. The abacus's central feature is the dharma chakra or wheel of dharma. To its right and left are the images of a bull and a horse, respectively, while the far left and right corners display the profiles of two other wheels. In keeping with the aesthetics of a state insignia, the bell-shaped lotus that holds up the capital is removed. The Mundaka Upanishad's "Satyameva Jayate", which translates as "Truth Alone Triumphs", is written in Devanagari script beneath the abacus and is separated from the main picture.

The Buddha gave his first sermon in Sarnath, emphasizing the Paths of Purity, Righteousness, and Virtue. Ahimsa (non-violence), tolerance, peace, and wealth were the intended themes, in addition to the deeper Buddhist symbolism on Ashoka's pillars. Thus, it was believed that the national emblem symbolized modern-day India's reaffirmation of its long-standing dedication to compassion and peace. The slogan "Satyameva Jayate" combined two old but different Indian traditions by contrasting a passage from a Hindu holy book with the Buddhist image.

Though it received criticism in certain quarters, the finished adaption was majestic and outstanding. The pedants complained that the capital was misrepresented, with only three lions visible instead of the actual four! The modified symbolism of the adaption, on the other hand, worried some people more. The adaptation changed the symbolism of the original capital, which featured four lions holding a wheel of dharma. Instead of representing the state's force defending dharma, the lions above the wheel on the abacus below now seemed to prioritize the power of the state and realism over dharma. The way that image, culture, and truth interact makes Kenneth Boulding's statement that "the image not only makes society, society continually remakes the image..." There are a total of fifteen languages were inscribed in the banknotes issued after the independence. The displayed languages are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. It reaffirms the linguistic diversity of the Nation with a careful addition of these official languages.



## Discussion and Conclusion

The Indian banknotes started to exhibit autonomy by replacing the portrait of King George VI with the lion capital. From that move, the Indian government slowly started to display the diversity of the flora and fauna. Peacock was recognized as a National bird in the year 1964, the reflection of this announcement can be seen in the Rs.10 note (Figure 24) issued in the 1980s. The images of elephants symbolize power and valor; the tiger informs about its unique glory and the extinction producing a non-linear narrative along with the language panel and the Lion Capital emblem. Designating Mahatma Gandhi as the watermark of the banknotes issued from 1996 onwards marks the acknowledgment of the Nation about the efforts and struggles to attain freedom in a non-violent way. The images of the UNESCO heritage sites are displayed in Mahatma Gandhi new series. It can be seen that in the Lion Capital series, the image of Tanjore temple (Figure 6) was displayed. The inclusion of the theme and logo of Swatch Bharath Abhiyan in the Mahatma Gandhi new series communicates that the Nation is heading a step towards cleanliness. From the colonial landscape having currency bearing the power of the colonizer to the independent land with currencies displaying its cultural and historical monuments, practices, and the advancements in diverse fields is the journey of the postmodern advancements in the technologies of printing industries.

Indian paper money having continuously undergone several revisions, did not fail to produce a visual narrative of the growth and heritage of the nation. Since each Indian banknote narrates the history and culture of the Nation in a non-fictitious way, it can be categorized under a new genre, 'Non-linear graphic non-fiction'. Through the analysis, the intellectual montage created while reading the paper money of Independent India is evident. The claim of Indian banknotes issued post-independence as imagetexts is absolute. "The term "imagetext" designates composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text. "Image-text," with a hyphen, designates relations of the visual and verbal" (Mitchell, 1994).

The role of technology in challenging and altering the role of the author(s) is/are noted. The ideas of textuality, authorship, and interpretation have attained a new level where the postmodern understanding set a path for the researchers to explore the explored/unexplored in a novel way. It would not have been possible without the advancements that have been happening in the printing industry. As a result of the mentioned growth, the analysis of Indian banknotes issued after the independence has been done through the lens of the picture theory of W.J.T. Mitchell which is also a thought process derived from the upgraded techniques in the printing industry to print pictures along with texts. This analysis brought out an understanding of where the Indian banknotes stand without the author(s) still holding the quality of being texts in the technologically growing/challenging world.

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